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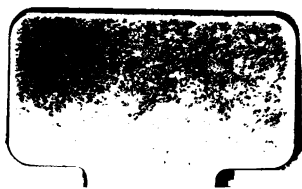
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# DROPS AND ROCKS

E. R. CONDER, D.D.









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THE HIDDEN WELL.

See page 25.

# DROPS AND ROCKS

## *AND OTHER TALKS WITH THE CHILDREN.*

BY  
EUSTACE R. CONDER, D.D.

"IN THE MORNING SOW THY SEED."—*Ecc.* xi. 6.



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## P R E F A C E.

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THIS little book will, I hope, not be less welcome to my young friends because some of them have read much of it in other forms. The opening piece, from which the volume is named, has not been in print before. The rest have been published; the longer ones as New Year's Addresses, the shorter ones in the *Congregationalist*, as "Talks with Children." They have all of them been revised,—in some cases I might almost say re-written. The reception they have met with has encouraged me to collect them in a volume.

Since the first of the New Year's Addresses was issued ("The Builders"), those for whom it was meant have grown out of childhood. New faces and voices fill the nursery, the school-room, and the playground, and gather round the fireside. Many—ah, how many!—bright young faces have vanished from earthly sight; we trust to shine in the light of the sorrowless Home. To all who care to read them, among those who now (for a few years) fill the children's places, whether in the homes with which I am familiar, or in homes where my face will never be seen, yet where I would fain be accounted a friend, these pages are affectionately dedicated.

E. R. C.



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## PROPS AND ROCKS.



**W**HAT is weaker than a drop of water?  
What is stronger than a rock? It  
is a common proverb, if we wish to  
describe immoveable strength, to  
say, "*as firm as a rock*;" or if we would describe  
weakness, "*weak as water*." Catch a drop of rain  
in your hand. Though perhaps it has fallen from  
a mile high, it will not hurt a baby's hand, it is

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so soft. As the warm sunshine rests on it, silently it dries up and is gone. Now pick up a pebble. If that were to fall upon you from as high up in the air as the rain-drop, it would kill you. Look at a great boulder of grey rock as it lies on the moor. If you were to dash your hand against it, you would draw it back bruised and bleeding. If a cannon-ball struck it, perhaps a few splinters would fly off, but the rock would fling back the cannon-ball as easily as you would fling back a cricket-ball in play. Does it not seem very unlikely that soft, weak water-drops can ever make any impression on hard rocks? Yet the Bible says,—

“THE WATERS WEAR THE STONES.”—JOB xiv. 19.

And so they do.

Pick up the hardest pebble you can find on the sea-shore,—granite or topaz or rock-crystal. Your sharpest knife will not scratch it. You may hammer away a long time with all your might, but you will not break it. But how did it come into that shape, so rounded and smooth? Once it was a ragged chip of rock, all edges and corners. But the sea waves and currents rolled it about, as

if in play, for thousands and thousands of years, rubbing and grinding it against other pebbles, till it grew shapely and polished as you see it now. Examine the cliffs by the sea-shore, and the rocky ledges over which the waves break in foam, and you will find that they have been worn into curious shapes, and sometimes hollowed into deep caves, by the dashing surges. Or look at some waterfall among the mountains, and you will find that the hard rock has been worn smooth by the continual pouring of the water over it. Often, too, the tiny rain-drops trickle into cracks in the rocks, and by slow degrees wash away the earth behind and underneath it; till at last the rock is loosened, and falls with a mighty crash. In some places, a whole mountain-side has thus been loosened, and has slid down into the valley, carrying houses along with it, or burying them under it. Thus, as JOB says:

“The mountain falling cometh to nought,  
And the rock is removed out of its place.  
The waters wear the stones.”

What lessons have these dashing waves, and falling streams, and trickling rain-drops, to teach us, as they ply their work, day after day, year

after year, century after century, carving, scooping, furrowing, polishing the rocks? Everything that God has made is full of lessons, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Job was in a very sorrowful mood when he spoke these words, and no wonder; for all his wealth and health and earthly joys were gone. So he could see nothing even in the sparkling dancing brooks and silver waterfalls but images of sorrow. "Everything," he thought, "is like me, decaying, wearing out, and going to ruin!" Poor sorrowful Job! He had no Bible, you know, to comfort him in his trouble. He did not know that God is able to take care even of the dust of the hills and the foam of the brooks. And he did not guess that God was preparing to make him richer and happier, as well as wiser and better, in after days than he had been before. He did not yet know what St. James calls "the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy" (JAMES v. 11). These words, which were such sorrowful words to Job, need not be at all sorrowful words to us. If we look at them with happy and thankful eyes, we may learn some very cheerful lessons, as well as some very warning lessons from them.

I. And first, as '*the waters wear the stones,*' they teach us a lesson of PERSEVERANCE. They write upon the rocks a parable of patient diligence. Question them—How can you, soft, feeble, tiny drops of water make any impression on the hard stones? They answer, "By *keeping always at it.* That is our secret. We never give up. Slow hard work it is, to be sure; so slow and hard that days and weeks pass, and we seem to have done nothing. Years pass, and you can hardly see our work. But we stick to it. We are never weary. And at last we conquer. '*The waters wear the stones.*'"

Some people want to do everything at a dash. They cannot bear patient plodding. They are splendid at the first go off. They are like a racer who at starting takes the lead, and distances all his rivals; but he lacks what is called '*staying power.*' By degrees, his breath and his legs begin to fail him; the other racers, little by little, steadily overtake him, and he comes in last of all. If the waters made a great dash at the rock, they would make a huge noise and commotion and split themselves into spray; but it is only by keeping always at it that little by little they wear the rock away.

I do not forget that some things have to be done with a dash if they are to be done at all. But the power to do them was gained by slow steady plodding. You might see a skilful painter, when a glorious sunset is lighting up the summer sky, hastily take out his sketch-book and paint-box, and little tin water-bottle, and dash the colours on his paper as if by magic. Before the sky has time to fade, there is a lovely little picture,—orange sky, and crimson clouds, and dark trees, and brook foaming among the rocks, and reflecting in a quiet pool the colours of the sky. Ask the painter how he has gained the power to make that picture so rapidly; and he will tell you—not by *dashing* at everything and doing it as quick as possible, but by patient work and dogged diligence, sticking to his work through many a tedious hour, drawing, and rubbing out, and drawing again, till at last painting has grown as easy to him as talking.

One day, a good many years ago, an officer was riding along a road which ran near the brink of a frightful precipice. Suddenly a carriage filled with people came tearing furiously down the hill. The horses had taken fright, and the driver in vain pulled with all his might to stop them. In another

minute, horses, carriage, and people would have rolled over the precipice. But the officer drew a pistol from his saddle, galloped alongside, and shot one of the horses dead, and so stopped the carriage just in time. The people were no doubt shaken and hurt, but their lives were saved. Now that was a thing which had to be done in a moment, or it could not have been done at all. Suppose a minute afterwards the officer had said to himself, "*Oh! I have a pistol; I might have shot one of the horses!*"—it would have been too late. But if you had asked him,—How did you come by that presence of mind, and coolness, and courage, which enabled you in an instant to do the only thing that could save those people?—he would have told you, not by galloping about firing off pistols, or by making brilliant dashes at things, and doing everything in a hurry; but by tedious drill, strict and prompt obedience to orders, learning day by day to think not about himself but about his duty, and punctually and faithfully to do it.

So you see, as I said, there are some things which must be done at a stroke, on the spur of the moment, or the opportunity is gone for ever. But the eye to see what is to be done, the skill to aim

the stroke, the strength to give it, the coolness and courage to be as steady and self-possessed at the moment as if you had plenty of time to spare,—these can come only by slow, patient, persevering work, like that with which *‘the waters wear the stones.’*

And it is only a few things, now and then, that need to be done thus suddenly. Most of the work of our daily life is such that patient perseverance counts for more than brilliant cleverness; so that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, but to those who stick to their purpose and never give in.

II. ‘The waters’ as they ‘wear the stones’ may teach us a PARABLE OF LIFE. They may remind us what little things may in time do great mischief.

Two schoolfellows—you may fancy them boys or girls, whichever you please, were such friends that they seemed never happy but in each other’s company. They were like twins. If any one had told them that some day their friendship would grow cold, they might have laughed, or they might have been angry; but they would have said—*“That is impossible!”* In one holiday ramble

they carved their initials side by side on a rock; and they said—"The weather may wear away the rock, and our initials may moulder away; but our friendship is stronger than the rock, and will never wear out." Some ten years, perhaps, after they have left school, you meet one of them, and ask, "Where is your old schoolfellow?" "I do not know. We have not met for years." "But you correspond, I suppose?" "Well, no. We have not written to one another for years." Strange! How did it come about? Well, it began with very little things. One of them perhaps made an unkind remark. The other felt hurt, and made a sharp reply. Each would have liked to say—"I was wrong; forgive me;" but each was too proud to be the first to speak. Perhaps I ought not to call this '*a little thing*,' for though it is about little things — shamefully little — that quarrels often begin, a quarrel is not a little thing; unkindness is not a little thing; pride is not a little thing, but a great sin. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." Let me tell you, there is nothing more un-Christian, more unlike the Lord Jesus, and grieving to God's Spirit, than the proud selfish temper which says "*I am not*



*going to be the first to say I am sorry, or to say Let us forgive and forget."* Perhaps the two friends did not exactly quarrel, but they were not *quite* as good friends as before. Then more little things happened. One heard that the other had said something, which if an explanation had been asked for could have been explained in a moment; but it was brooded over in silence, and so it made another little crack in their friendship.

"It is the little rift within the lute  
That by and by will make the music mute,  
And ever widening slowly silence all.

"The little rift within the lover's lute,  
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,  
That rotting inward slowly moulders all."

Then, perhaps, one was a little jealous of the friends the other made. Or one was too busy to answer the other's letters as quickly as usual. And so, little by little, a thousand trifles fretted and rubbed away the friendship that once seemed firmer than the rock; and the stream of years flows over it and buries it.

Not a few homes, I am afraid, could be found, in which it would pay to have this motto—" *The waters wear the stones*"—put up in golden letters,

if only everybody would learn its lessons. They seem to lack nothing that is needed for a happy home. The parents are well-to-do, educated, sensible people, anxious for the welfare of their children. The children have good health, good abilities, good education, abundant means of enjoyment. Yet the Home is not a happy one. Why not? Do they not love one another? Yes, in a sort. If one of the boys broke his leg, all his sisters would stay at home to nurse him. If one of the sisters died, the whole family would be in deep grief. What is amiss? Only this, that they have none of them learned how much both the happiness and the unhappiness of life depend on *little things*. None of them has learned to give up in little things. None of them can refrain from a little ill-natured joke, a little sharp answer, that cuts like a pen-knife, or pricks like a needle. Little opportunities for a kind action, a kind word, a kind look, slip by continually. And so, because life is mostly made up of little things, the happiness of Home is bit by bit destroyed, even as "*the waters wear the stones*."

### III. The water-worn rock, with the furrows and

channels which the water has so slowly but deeply carved, teaches us another parable,—a PARABLE OF CHARACTER.

Do you understand what is meant by 'character'? You ought, for it is the most important thing about anybody. A person's *character* means *what sort of person* he is. Don't you know some boys or girls of whom if any one told you they had told a lie, or done some mean, cruel, dishonest thing, you would say "*I can't believe that; it isn't like him!*" And there are others of whom you would say "I can easily believe it; it is just like him." It is his character. Some people are so stiff in their opinion or determined on having their own way, that you can no more persuade them than you can bend an iron poker. Others are so easily persuaded that they are like reeds, blown this way and that by every breeze. It is their character. Some people have a character for unpunctuality: they are always a little behindhand. Other people are always in time; nobody ever knew them come late to church, or miss a train, or be the last down to breakfast. Punctuality is part of their character. And we find that people are very apt to keep through life the character they form when they are boys and girls.

Often you may hear it said—"Ah! I remember him at school. He is just the same now as he used to be."

Now, how is this? Partly because we are *born* different. No two babies are exactly alike. But chiefly our character depends on the HABITS we form. What are 'habits'? Habits are the ways we get into of behaving, or speaking, or thinking and feeling. There are good habits, and bad habits. And how do these habits grow? Little by little, as *the waters wear the stones*.

An evil habit, such as lying, or sloth, or drunkenness, or gluttony, or gambling, or bad language, often has such a small beginning that it could be broken off as easily as you pour away a cupful of water. But little by little, drop by drop, day by day, it grows, till at last it is like a swift deep torrent, sweeping away one who has fallen into it. His struggles are vain. Nothing but a miracle of God's mercy can save him.

And good habits, what are they like? They too have small beginnings, like a tiny silver thread of water trickling from the rock, which joins itself to other tiny rills, and is fed by the rains of heaven and the deep mountain springs, till at last it grows

to a broad deep beautiful river, reflecting the sky from its calm breast, in which ships with their rich freights can sail, and from which a whole city may drink.

Another thing water sometimes does, quite as wonderful as wearing the stones away,—*making stones grow*. At Knaresborough, in Yorkshire, there is what is called “The Dropping Well.” At the foot of a rock that hangs over like a pent-house, is a pool, into which the water does not pour over the rock, but soaks through from above and comes dropping down like rain. Here you may see many curious things, which all seem made of stone. Here is a stone bird’s nest, with four eggs in it. Once a bird built that nest, of soft moss, and lined it with soft hair and feathers. The eggs lay there fresh, and full of life; if the bird had sat on them they would have been hatched, and little birds would have come forth to soar in the air and sing among the trees. Now all is hard, cold, dead. Here, again, is a stone book. Once it was a real book. Perhaps in it were charming stories, sweet hymns, beautiful pictures. Now all is sealed up in stone. It can never be opened again. How is this? Those tiny drops of water have done it all.

Catch some of them in a wine-glass: the water looks clear and sparkling. Drink some; you taste nothing in it. Yet in every drop of that water there is dissolved a little portion of rock—so little that the strongest microscope could not show it; and as the water drops on the nest, or the book, or anything else put there to be '*petrified*', it leaves a little invisible film of stone. Little by little the stony coating grows; till at last nothing but stone is to be seen. The people at the well take away the petrified nest, or book, or pen, or cricket-ball, and put something else in its place. '*Petrifying*', or '*petrification*' means turning to stone.

What does this teach us? The Bible speaks of '*a stony heart*';\* that is, a heart hardened in sinful habits, and in unbelief and forgetfulness of God. Once, the heart of the most ungodly and hardened sinner was the heart of a little child. Perhaps, like the stories and hymns, and pictures in the petrified book, that child had in his memory many a Bible story and picture, and sweet hymn. Perhaps as he knelt by his mother's knee, or sat by his father's fireside, words of prayer and songs

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\* Ezek. xi. 19; xxxvi. 26; Zech. vii. 12.

of praise went up from his lips, like birds soaring out of their nest and singing among the green leaves. Now, all is forgotten. The sinner's heart is "past feeling",\*— cold, hard, dead, petrified; '*a stony heart.*'

How did it come about? Little by little, evil habits grew; the habit of neglecting prayer, of neglecting God's word, of making jokes about holy things, of careless ungodliness, of love of the world; perhaps habits of dishonesty, or of intemperance, or of other deadly sins, and "foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."† Alas! Is there no hope, no remedy? Our merciful Saviour answers, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."‡ If even the hardened sinner, who has lost all good and right and tender feeling, and whose evil habits bind him like chains, would turn to God in earnest prayer, God would fulfil to him the wonderful promise He gave to the Jews of old,—"

"A new heart will I give you;  
And a new spirit will I put within you.  
And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh;  
And I will give you a heart of flesh."

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\* Eph. iv. 19.

† 1 Tim. vi. 9.

‡ Mark x. 27.

See! Half-an-hour has passed away while you and I have been having this talk about the rocks and the water-drops. Half-an-hour of life spent and gone,—gone for ever! How did it go? One moment at a time. Little by little, as the ‘waters wear the stones’, our lives are wearing away, passing, becoming part of the PAST.

When the poet LONGFELLOW looked at the old clock on the stairs and listened to the slow ticking of its long pendulum; do you know what it seemed to him to be saying?—

“Never—for ever!  
For ever—never!”

That is what every moment says; ‘NEVER can I come back; FOR EVER the good or the evil you and every one else has done with me will abide unchangeable.’

The arrow sped, no hand can stay;  
The spoken word, no lips unsay;  
Nor years re-knit what moments sever,  
The deed once done is done for ever.  
The planted seed, for joy or woe,  
To nothing but its kind can grow.  
No backward step life’s path may trace,  
Nor penitence one sin efface.

C



How very dreadful it would be to think of all this, if it were not for the glad tidings which GOD has sent to us, not in the rocks and the rain-drops, but in His word, and by His dear Son. We cannot change the past; but God can forgive it. Tears of repentance cannot wash away one sin; but the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. That means that the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross, when His life-blood flowed from His wounds and from His broken heart, was the sacrifice and atonement for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world. For His sake, God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You must not think this means that the Lord Jesus *persuades* His Father to forgive us. No! It was because God so loved and pitied us that He "spared not His own Son"; In giving His Son to suffer and die for us, God took the burden and sorrow of our sins upon Himself. For JESUS says "I and my Father are one".

Yes! Even the sins of a long lifetime can be taken away, not little by little, but all at once; for the Lord Jesus is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." But

how much better, safer, wiser, happier to come to Him in youth—even in childhood—not only to be forgiven, but to be kept from sin. Then, little by little, He will make you wise and strong. Step by step he will help you to follow Him. And if the minutes and hours, days and years, are wearing our lives away, as “the waters wear the stones”,—no matter! Let them go! They bring us nearer to that blessed Home where nothing will ever wear out, and life will never waste or decay, but “the LAMB who is in the midst of the throne” shall lead us “unto living fountains of waters”.





## DUST.



**W**HAT can seem of less consequence, or more worthless, than a pinch of dust? You have but to open your fingers and the wind blows it away in a moment and you see it no more. Yet if but one small grain of dust is blown into your eye it will give you a great deal of trouble. One of the terrible plagues of Egypt sprung from a handful of dust, which God commanded Moses to fling into the air. Every little grain scattered into millions and millions of invisible poison-atoms floating through the air; and wherever they settled, on man or beast, dreadful boils and ulcers broke out.

In the great deserts of Arabia and Africa the stormy wind sometimes brings such clouds of sand-dust, hot and stifling, that they hide the sun, and

make the day as dark as night. The travellers have to lie flat on their faces, and the horses and camels to bend their noses down close to the ground, or they would be suffocated. Sometimes whole caravans have thus perished; and even a great army was once destroyed and buried in these terrible clouds of hot dust. In Egypt, temples and cities have been buried under hills of sand, made up of tiny grains, which the wind has kept sweeping up from the desert for hundreds of years.

Very great things, you see, may come from very small things—even from dust.

When our Saviour sent out His twelve apostles to preach, He said to them, "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, *shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them.*" (Mark vi. 11.) Those people who listened to their teaching, and took them into their houses, would bring water to wash the dust from their feet, and would have their dusty sandals wiped clean, for that was the custom in that country, where people wore sandals instead of shoes and stockings. (See Luke vii. 44; Mark vi. 9.) So if they went away from a town or village with dusty feet, that would show that the people had not

been kind to them, and so it would be a *witness against* those people.

Once, in a certain part of Germany, a box of treasure that was being sent by railway was found at the end of the journey to have been opened and emptied of the treasure, and filled with stones and rubbish. The question was who was the robber? Some sand was found sticking to the box, and a clever mineralogist having looked at the grains of sand through his microscope, said that there was only one station on the railway where there was that kind of sand. Then they knew that the box must have been taken out at that station; and so they found out who was the robber. The *dust under his feet*, where he had sat down the box to open it, was a *witness against him*.

Suppose when people take off their shoes or boots when they come home, every grain of dust could have a tiny tongue and tell where it came from! What different stories they would have to tell! "We," say one little pair of shoes, "are all covered with sand from the sea-shore, where we have been running about all day." "We," say a strong, clumsy pair of boots, "have been all day following the plough." "And we have brought

sand from the floors of country cottages ;” “and we, dust from the unswept floors of poor garrets ;” “and we, mud from many a lane and court and alley.” Well-used shoes these ; that are busy day after day, carrying comfort to the poor, and the sick, and the sorrowful. And here are a pair of elegant high-heeled boots with hardly a speck on them, for they have done nothing but step from the carpet to the carriage, and from the carriage to the carpet : I am afraid they have no story worth telling. And here are the village postman’s shoes, stained with mud of all colours, and thick with dust from twenty miles of road and footpath, park sward and farmyard, as he trudged his daily round. Here is a solitary shoe, for its poor old owner has but one leg, and a wooden stump for the other ; and it is laden with the dust of the crossing he has been sweeping, for a few pence, all day long.

Some people, I am afraid, would rub and wipe their shoes for a long time, as hard as they could, if they thought the dust under their feet would tell tales of where they have been.

At every step you take, you bring something away with you and leave something behind. Every step, even over smooth pavement ? Yes ; for a well-

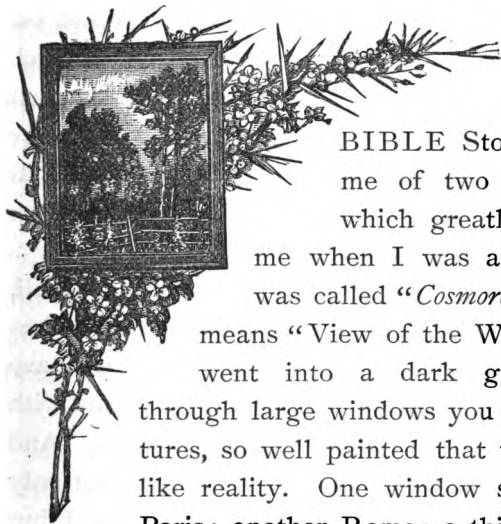
trained bloodhound would be able to follow your steps for a whole day, though they have left no foot-marks, and to pick them out among ten thousand.

Just so, in our journey of life, in which every day is a stage, and every word and thought a step, we are continually leaving something behind, and taking something with us. Your words, and tones, and looks, and ways are leaving footprints in the memories and thoughts of your companions, some of which will be like footsteps in sand, soon washed away; but some will last, and never be forgotten. Try to leave pleasant, happy footprints all the way. Pray that, when your life-journey comes to an end, the *dust under your feet* may show that you have been walking in the right road—the road of truth, and love, and duty, along which our Lord Jesus trod, even as a child, “leaving us an example, that we should walk in His steps.” (1 Pet. ii. 21.)





## THE HIDDEN WELL.



BIBLE Stories remind me of two exhibitions which greatly delighted me when I was a boy. One was called "*Cosmorama*," which means "View of the World." You went into a dark gallery, and through large windows you beheld pictures, so well painted that they looked like reality. One window showed you Paris; another Rome; a third, a Swiss village with snow-peaked mountains; a fourth, the bank of a great American river, and so on. The other exhibition was called "*Camera Obscura*,"



which means "Dark Chamber." You went into a dark room, and on a sort of glass table you beheld a moving coloured picture of the scenery outside. The trees waved, the clouds floated across the sky, the people moved about, some remaining awhile in the picture, then slowly departing; others quickly crossing it and vanishing. It was a living picture.

Now, only imagine how delightful it would be, if there were a wonderful window through which we could look not only into distant countries, but into distant times; and see moving about before our eyes the people who lived and died thousands of years ago, when this dear country of ours was not yet named "England," and was mostly a wilderness of forests, moors, and marshes! Well, the Bible Stories may be likened to such a wonderful *Cosmorama* and *Camera*, in one; only we have to look at the pictures they set before us not with our bodily eyes but with our mind's eyes. And what is best of all, these histories tell us not only what the people they speak of did and said, but what they thought; and what God thought of them, and said to them.

Come now with me; open your "mind's eyes,"

and let us look through this wonderful window into the past. What do we see?

### THE PICTURE.

We see a wide desolate wilderness, on which the blazing sunshine is poured down as if the sky were a vast furnace. Mountains meet our eye whichever way we look; some near, some far away. Long wavy lines of mountain on the horizon, silvery grey or pale purple. In nearer view, towering cliffs and rugged peaks of bare rock, and awful precipices, strangely coloured with dull crimson, orange, and violet. The level ground in front in some places shows grass parched with the sun; in others shingle or rock, hard and hot as if baked in an oven. Here and there is a tree, or a cluster of bushes. In the distance you may see one or two groves of lofty palms. Near them are flocks of gazelles feeding. Troops of wild asses gallop past, rejoicing in their desert freedom. Nowhere can you espy a hut or tent, road or bridge, hedge or fence. There is no token of human presence, save only two lonely travellers, moving wearily and uncertainly as if they had lost their way. One of them is a dark-skinned, black-haired woman,

with great dark eyes, thickish lips, a proud, handsome, sorrowful face: having an empty kid-skin, such as Arabs use to carry water, slung across her shoulders. The other is a strong-limbed, keen-eyed, noble-looking lad of about sixteen, who totters as if ready to faint. Their lips are dry and cracked, their tongues so parched they can scarcely speak. Their skin feels as if it would peel off; their heads as if they would burst. Every thing around them,—rocks, bushes, mountains, all seem swimming in a bath of heat. The water is all spent in their bottle; not a drop left; and they know that if they cannot find water they must die. Strong as the lad is, he has to lean on his mother's arm. She is more used to the desert than he, and better able to bear the torturing thirst. She guides the lad's unsteady steps to a bush which casts a short shadow, lays him down there, almost as if he were a baby again; and then goes and sits down under another bush, "a good way off, as it were a bowshot; for she said 'Let me not see the death of the child.'" She bursts into a loud passion of weeping, utterly heart-broken. It seems to her that all the world has turned against her; God seems to have for-

gotten her, and forgotten His promises; and she and her darling son, whom she was so proud of, are thrust out to die.

Did you ever see a sadder picture? A true one, remember. There was a day, an hour, a moment, when all this was "NOW"; and the thousands of years that have since rolled away had not yet begun.

#### THE MYSTERY.

It is as strange as sad. Not that there would be anything strange in two travellers losing their way and dying of thirst in those pathless Arabian deserts. Alas! that has but too often happened. It would happen much oftener, but that when people have to travel through the desert, they join in companies, and have guides who know where the wells and springs of water are to be found. How, then, came this mother and son to be wandering thus, without guide or helper? Here comes the strange, mysterious part of the story. Even a poor man would not like to send away any one he cared for on a journey across that wild desert without an experienced guide, well armed against robbers, and a camel, or at least an ass, to carry food and water. No one but a cruel, wicked man would desire that

even his enemies should die so dreadful a death as perishing of thirst in the wilderness. Yet the person who has sent these two wanderers forth from the plenty and safety and comfort which until now they have always enjoyed, is one of the richest men in the whole country, and the best and most pious man in the whole world: Abraham, called for his piety, the Friend of God! The woman is Hagar, Abraham's wife; and the lad is Abraham's son, Ishmael.

Abraham could easily have spared a few camels and asses, laden with abundant provision; and half a dozen strong, trusty shepherds, to have guided Hagar and her boy safe across the desert to her native land of Egypt. Yet they were turned out alone, on foot, with just as much bread and water as they could carry; and having lost their way (as it was likely they would do), they had no prospect but to die, with no eye to pity them, and leave their bodies to be speedily devoured by vultures and hyænas.

Strangest of all, this was by God's own command! The Bible says "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son." Well it might be. Perhaps it was the greatest

trial of his life, except the one crowning trial, twenty years or more afterwards, when God told him to sacrifice his darling Isaac. But Abraham knew that God must have wise reasons for what He commanded, and that his part was to obey, mystery or no mystery. So he rose up early in the morning, and did just as God told him; and then left the matter in God's hand. He knew that God had promised to bless Ishmael, and to make him the ancestor of twelve princes and of a great nation. He knew also that, come what might, God's promise could not be broken. It seemed hard, very hard, for Hagar and Ishmael to be driven out, almost like beggars, from amidst all the wealth which Abraham's camp contained. It was very mysterious. But God so ordered it; and that was enough. God must have His own good reasons, as He always has, though neither Abraham nor Hagar nor Ishmael could understand what those reasons were.

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

“Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His work in vain :  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.”

#### HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

Let us go back in the story for a few years, and see how it all came about.

In those old times a custom had grown up (as in Mohammedan countries at the present day) for a man to have more wives than one. It was not pleasing to God, and usually turned out very unhappily; but still the law did not forbid it. For many years, Abraham had but one wife, Sarah; but as they had no child, Sarah at length gave Hagar, an Egyptian bondmaid, or slave, to be a second wife; not at all intending Hagar to be equal with herself, but thinking that if Hagar had a son, she (that is Sarah) would reckon him as her own boy. So it turned out. God gave Hagar a son, of whom she was not a little proud; and Sarah adopted him as her own. Abraham also loved him tenderly; and called his name ISHMAEL, which means “God will hear.” Almost the same name, you see, as Samuel; which means “heard by God.” Until he was about fourteen

years old, Ishmael was Abraham's only son. A great pet, I dare say, he was among Abraham's many shepherds and other servants and their children. As he played with them among the tents, or in the pastures where the flocks and herds were feeding, and by the brooks and wells where the shepherds led them to watering, he would make the other boys obey him, and do what he chose; and they would say to him, "You are our little chief, our master's son." "Some day," he used to think, "when my father grows very old and dies, all this camp and these servants and herds and flocks will be mine!" So I am afraid he grew proud, selfish, and self-willed. It is very dangerous for any of us, young or old, but especially while we are young, to have our own way in everything. And therefore it is often much safer to be poor than to be rich.

At length, God gave Sarah a son of her own, as He had promised, whom Abraham named "ISAAC," which means "he shall laugh;" because there was such great joy at his birth. Not joy for Ishmael, however, for now he found this little baby set above him, and learned that Isaac, not he, would be heir of Abraham's wealth. It would

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have been very brave and noble of Ishmael, and very pleasing in God's sight, if he had loved his little brother, notwithstanding his disappointment, and said—"Never mind; if God appoints it so it must be all right; and my father will still care for me, though I am not to have his wealth."

Do you think you could have been so noble and gentle and self-denying, if you had been in Ishmael's place?

There were not wanting, I dare say, those who were foolish and wicked enough to stir up and encourage Ishmael's proud and envious feelings; and to tease and provoke him by saying, "You are nobody now: this new little baby will be lord of all; and nobody will care for you!" Poor Ishmael! I pity him. It is always difficult enough to do right, and to keep down envious evil temper; and if you hearken to bad or foolish companions, it grows ten times more difficult. But, you know, right is right, and wrong is wrong, for all that. The harder you find it to do right, and to conquer your own temper, the more earnestly you must ask God's help. The sharper the conflict, the nobler the victory. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

Ishmael, I fear, did not try to rule his spirit. St. Paul says he "persecuted" poor little Isaac: an innocent little baby, who knew no reason why his brother should hate him. The story in Genesis says that when Abraham made a feast in honour of his little son, at that time between two and three years old, Sarah saw Ishmael "mocking:" not in good-humoured play, but in bitter anger, turning the whole thing into ridicule, forgetting all the respect due to his father; all that was generous, kind, or dutiful.

Sarah took alarm. She saw that it would never do to let the two boys grow up together. Ishmael never would be happy; and by and by there might be a fierce quarrel, with consequences too dreadful to think of. Abraham was deeply grieved. He took his trouble in prayer to God, according to his custom. Then came this strange mysterious command: he must send away Ishmael and his mother from their home, with two or three days' provision of bread and water, to journey alone through the wild terrible wilderness. And now we come back to where we left them: Ishmael lying on the ground under the shrub, a little refreshed with the rest and shade; and his mother

at a distance under another bush, weeping, heart-broken, too much in despair even to pray.

#### ISHMAEL'S PRAYER.

In this dreadful danger, what was Ishmael to do? Just what Hagar should have done. Just what you and I ought to do in every danger, trouble, or difficulty. He prayed. "God heard the voice of the lad." The Bible does not say that God heard Hagar's voice, though she "lifted up her voice and wept." Why does it say, twice over, that God heard the voice of Ishmael? Of course, God hears everything. Every word you speak,—every kind, gentle, helpful word; every cross, unjust, foolish word—God hears, however softly spoken. But when the Bible speaks of God *hearing the voice* of any one, it means, attending to and answering prayer. Ishmael's voice was too faint to reach his mother's ear, but God heard it. Ishmael had been taught to pray; for God said of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." But you may well believe Ishmael had never prayed before as he prayed then. Perhaps he said—"Let me try if my name, 'Ishmael,' speaks true. Will God hear?"

Did he deserve to be heard? He could not think so. His own misconduct had brought him and his mother into this frightful trouble; and that was the worst of it. What may we suppose his prayer like, if we could have heard it? Perhaps something like this:—

“O Lord God of my father Abraham! Have pity on me. Have pity on my poor mother. I have been foolish and wicked. It is all my fault. But thou art my father Abraham’s God. He is Thy friend, and I am his son, though I have been an undutiful son. O Lord, for my father’s sake have mercy on us. We are dying of thirst. O God, have mercy on us, and send us some water that my mother may not die!”

Very likely good old Abraham, far away in his tent, with aching heart, was praying too for his poor wanderers. But it tells us nothing about that.

“God heard the voice of the lad. And the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand, for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water;

and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink."

How quickly the answer came; and how easily! God often keeps His children waiting long for answers to prayer; but that is only when it is best for them to wait. The well was there all the time; near at hand, full of refreshing water. But it was hidden. Hagar, blinded with her tears, could not see it till "God opened her eyes"; that is, helped her to see it. Do you ask, How? Perhaps she suddenly noticed that in one spot the grass was greener than in the parched ground elsewhere, showing that water lurked there in some deep hiding place. Perhaps she saw foot-steps in the sand, of men and of flocks, which she had not noticed before, and these pointed to the hidden well. Perhaps some block of stone, half hidden in sand, which before seemed only like the other bits of rock strewn about, suddenly looked to her as if it could be moved; and she found it the cover of the well. Arab shepherds are accustomed to cover their wells carefully, and hide them, if they can, from passers-by. But no one can hide what God chooses to make plain; and there is no eye-salve like prayer. God did not need to work

a miracle to answer Ishmael's prayer. He only needed to enable Hagar to see what was already provided. In a few minutes, all their trouble was over. As they drank, and drank again, new life seemed to flow through all their veins. Soon they were strong enough to journey, rejoicing in this great deliverance, which told them that God had not forgotten them; and encouraged them to trust Him for all time to come.

"God was with the lad," the Bible tells us. Ishmael grew up brave and strong and free, in the wild desert, where his descendants dwell to this day. Often, perhaps, in after years, he may have passed the hidden well, and stopped to drink of it, remembering the lesson he had there learned of faith in his father's God. It is pleasant to know that more than seventy years afterwards, when Abraham died, Ishmael and Isaac (not even then very old men, as men's ages were then reckoned) met as brothers and mourned together by their father's grave.

#### A DIP INTO THE WELL.

Truth, the proverb says, lies in a well; and in this hidden well which Ishmael's prayer uncovered, lies many a true lesson, if only we have the right sort of pitcher to dip and draw.

First of all: how came the well to be there, just where and when it was wanted? The Arab shepherds who dug it never meant it for wandering travellers, but for their own flocks. Hagar and Ishmael, when they lost their way and wandered on in despair, did not know that every weary step, every miserable moment, was leading them to the water for which they were thirsting. God meant that well for them, and guided their feet towards it. He led them by a way they knew not. He kept the well hidden until the deliverance could come in answer to prayer. Then, in a moment, He opened Hagar's eyes, and behold! there was the well close at hand.

Life is full of hidden wells: stored up blessings, ready at the right moment to supply the answer to prayer. Many a weary broken-hearted wanderer who has missed his way in life,—many a busy traveller along the hot dusty highways of the world, passes close by a well of living water, and sees it not. Why? Because he does not pray. "Ye have not because ye ask not." Often, too, when we do pray, the answer comes so quickly and naturally, that we are tempted to say—"I need not have prayed!" Never say that. Never think it. God foresees our prayers as well as our

necessities. Our Heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of, *before we ask Him*. But he says, "Ask, and ye shall receive." And as the light of the Pole-star which meets the traveller's eye and guides his steps, started on its swift journey thousands of years ago; so if need were, God would have prepared thousands of years ago the answer to even a child's prayer, rather than break His promise.

Another truth we draw from Ishmael's well is this: our encouragement to pray is not our own goodness, but God's. Ishmael's trouble was of his own making. He could not fancy that he deserved to be heard. But he knew that the Lord had spared his cousin Lot in answer to Abraham's prayer, and would even have spared Sodom if there had been ten good men in it: surely then He would spare Abraham's own son. How much stronger is our encouragement to pray, who can plead not the name of Abraham, or any earthly parent or friend, but the name of JESUS, God's own dear Son! "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?"

What a little thing a draught of cold water is! But to one dying of thirst, it is the most pre-



cious thing in the world. All the gold and jewels on earth would be despised in comparison. Learn from this not to think little things of no importance, or to suppose that God thinks so; and not to be afraid (as some people are) to pray to God about little things as well as great.

I will give you two reasons which prove that God does not disdain to attend to little things: *First*, because He has made many more little things than great, and has made the greatest things to depend on the least. Worlds are made up of atoms; forests spring from acorns, and harvests from grains of seed. Events which change the history of the world, may grow out of one little thought in one poor man's mind. Little duties, little sins, little joys, little troubles, make up most of our daily life. Therefore "in EVERY THING . . . let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. iv. 6).

*Secondly*, God is so great, that the difference between what we call 'great' and 'little,' is to Him as nothing; and He is so wise that nothing—not a thought or an atom—is small enough to escape His eye.

"To Him is nothing great, is nothing small:

He guides the comet's course, He marks the sparrow's fall."

Is there in your heart any secret trouble, or wish, or temptation, which you do not like to tell even to your dearest friend? Tell it to your Heavenly Father. Tell it to the Lord Jesus. The Eye that saw Ishmael fainting under the bush, reads your heart. The Ear that was open to his prayer is open to yours. God will not, indeed, grant requests which are either wrong, hurtful, or foolish. But it is ours to pray; it is His to judge if it be wise and right to give what we ask; and if not, we must trust to Him to do better for us than we can either ask or think.

Prayer is itself a *hidden well*: a secret source of joy and strength and wisdom, not only in times of trouble, but always. Trouble is a hard teacher, though its lessons are precious. Do not wait for it to drive you to prayer; but say like the Psalmist, "O God, thou art MY God: early will I seek thee."

Sinful pleasures are compared in Scripture to "broken cisterns that can hold no water." God calls Himself "the Fountain of living waters." Earthly treasures and joys at the best are perishable: like wells that dry up and leave the thirsty traveller to die. "Whosoever drinketh of this water," says the Saviour, "shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give

him shall never thirst; BUT THE WATER THAT I SHALL GIVE HIM SHALL BE IN HIM A WELL OF WATER, springing up into everlasting life."

Let me tell you

A FABLE.

One bright summer, long ago, two rock-doves, brother and sister, were hatched and reared in the same nest. Autumn and winter came and went; and in the happy spring-tide the Two Doves, dressed in their full plumage, found mates, and began to think where they should build their nests. The sister-dove said, "The sweetest, safest, happiest place is in the cleft of the Rock, where our parents built before us." Her brother answered, "I am tired of these gloomy rocks; I will fly forth and see the world, and build where I please." So he flew forth with his mate.

He saw the Lark build on the ground; and he said "I will build here." But a herd of oxen rushing by trampled on his nest.

He saw the Stork build on the house top; and he said "I will build here." But the house caught fire, and the nest was burned.

He saw the Wood-pigeon build in a lofty cedar; and he said "I will build here." But the lightning

struck the tree, and his mate and her two young ones were killed.

Then, through the fierce tempest, the poor Dove, with torn plumage and sorrowful heart, flew back to the great Rock, in a cleft of which he found his sister sitting safe and peaceful on her nest, with her young ones beneath her wings.

“O brother!” she cried, “how glad I am you are come back! You will be safe here.” “Yes,” he answered mournfully; “I am safe, but I have lost all. Oh that I had built in the Rock at first!”





## WHAT GOD CANNOT DO.



IS there anything God cannot do? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" No, nothing is too hard. "With God," our Lord Jesus tells us, "all things are possible." Yet the Bible tells us of something which God cannot do. It is "*impossible for God to lie.*" (Hebrews vi. 18.) And St. Paul teaches us that the reason why we may be sure without doubt or fear that all who believe the gospel and trust our Saviour shall have eternal life, is this:—

"GOD, THAT CANNOT LIE, PROMISED."—TITUS i. 2.

I. Let me try to explain how this is—that God can do all things, and yet it is impossible for Him to lie. It is because there are two different sorts of impossibility. Suppose some rich people who have no child of their own think they should like

to buy a child and bring it up as their own. They see a beautiful little boy with large bright eyes and curling hair, whose mother is very poor, and they say, "We will give you a purse full of gold for that child. Will you sell it?" The poor mother would be glad indeed of the gold, but she looks quite frightened and angry, and says, "Sell my child! No, indeed, I cannot do that!" Why *cannot* she sell her child? Because she loves him too well to part with him for gold or anything else. She *could*, you see, and yet she *cannot*.

A boy who was fond of apples one day saw a tree loaded with rich, ripe, rosy fruit, and felt sorely tempted to shake some down and eat them. Somebody asked him afterwards, "Why didn't you steal a few? Nobody was near to see you." "Yes," said the boy, "*I should have seen myself.*" And God would have seen him. And so, much as he longed for the fruit, he *could not* take it.

Now do you see why God CANNOT lie? He could say what is false, or break His word, if He pleased. But He *cannot please*. "A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." "God is not a man, that He should lie." (Deut. xxxii. 4; Num. xxiii. 19.) Nothing is too hard for His

power to perform; for He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." But He cannot do anything that would be wrong or unwise, or say anything false, because He is perfectly holy, wise, and good. How you ought to hate the very thought of telling a lie! It is *what God cannot do*.

II. Sometimes a kind and wise father says to his son when he asks him to promise something, "I cannot promise; you must wait and see." Perhaps the father does not quite know what he will do, or what will be best, or he wishes to keep it a secret. But if his children all come to him, earnestly joining in one request, and he says, "Well, children, I will do as you wish," they all cry out joyfully, "Promise, father, promise!" "Yes," he says, "I promise." Then how cheerful and merry they are! They feel safe, because their father always keeps his promise. And yet, you know, even the wisest and best earthly father might make a mistake. Sickness or accident might disable him from keeping his promise. Important business he had not foreseen might take up all his time; and he might even forget his promise. But God never forgets; never mistakes; always knows what is best, and foresees all

that is going to happen. So if He has promised, we may be sure that He will never break His word.

“His every word of grace is strong  
As that which built the skies;  
The voice that rolls the stars along  
Speaks all the promises.”

God might, if He had pleased, have said to us, “I cannot tell you what I am going to do for you; you must wait and see. You are ignorant, and cannot understand my reasons for what I do. You are sinful, and do not deserve that I should promise you anything. Be content, and trust all to me.” And then it would have been our duty to rest content, and to say (as good old Eli said to Samuel), “It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good.”

Well, there are some things about which God deals thus with His children. For example, He has not promised how many years you shall live; or whether to-morrow, or next week, or next month shall bring you joy or sorrow, health or sickness. When your birthday comes your friends wish you “Many happy returns of the day;” but they cannot say that God has promised you many, or that they shall be happy. No; these are among

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the things of which God says, "Wait, my children, and trust me." But all those things which are really most needful for us, and about which it is good for us to be quite certain that we shall have them, God has PROMISED. Why? Because He wishes to teach us to trust Him. He wishes us to be full of joy and hope, like those children who say, "Father has promised! father has promised!"

St. Paul tells us that the gospel was promised by God beforehand—"by His prophets in the holy Scriptures." (Rom. i. 2.) The great promise of God from the most ancient times was, that He would send a Saviour. That promise was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus came to redeem us. And now, "This is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life." (1 John ii. 25.)

Suppose next Sunday afternoon you try to find *six texts* about God's promises.





## SUNBEAMS.



THE old Greeks were great lovers of Nature; I mean, they dearly loved the trees, and streams, and mountains, and forests, and clouds, and stars, and all that God has made in heaven above and earth beneath. They loved all these things because of their beauty. They did not know Who made them. We should love them, not only because they are beautiful, but for another and greater reason: because it is God who has made them so beautiful. The Greeks loved to fancy that in all the trees and streams and mountains dwelt different sorts of spirits, or fairies, who sometimes talked with men. They fancied, too, that the stars, as they move in the sky, make sweet music; only our ears are not sharp enough to hear it. Our old English fore-

fathers, like the Greeks, used to believe in elves, and gnomes, and kelpies, and other fanciful creatures. Now we have left off believing in such fables and fancies, and we know that the stars do not make music. But for all this, let me assure you, the trees and flowers, and hills and waterfalls can talk to us, and the stars sing to us, and the showers and dewdrops tell us stories,—if only we have ears to hear.

Do you understand what I mean? Or do I seem to be talking riddles? I mean what David meant, when he sang—

“Day unto day uttereth speech,  
And night unto night showeth knowledge.”

As the same Psalm says, “there is no speech nor language; without these their voice is heard.” The wind rustling among the leaves, and roaring through the forest; the waves dashing and murmuring along the shore; the babble of the tiny brook; the thundering roar of the mighty Niagara;—all these, and a thousand other voices of nature, utter no words. The grass and trees grow silently. The flowers silently unfold their lovely colours, and cannot answer if we question them. The humming bees, and cawing rooks, and songful larks and

linnets, cannot speak our language. Yet all these have wonderful things to tell us, if only we attend to them aright; yes, more truly wonderful than if a fairy spoke from every bush. And the silent, bright, punctual stars—never a moment after their proper time, or a hairbreadth out of their right place, looking just as beautiful every clear night as when Adam and Eve first looked at them—have also their stories to tell and hymns to sing to us.

“What though in solemn silence all  
Move round this dark terrestrial ball;  
What though no real voice nor sound  
Amidst their shining orbs be found;  
In Reason’s ear they all rejoice,  
And utter forth a glorious voice;  
For ever singing as they shine,  
‘The Hand that made us is Divine!’”

As I write, the sunshine falls bright and clear on my page. Suppose you and I have a little talk with the SUNBEAMS, and see what they can tell us.

Sunbeams! how long have you taken on your journey?

“About eight minutes.”

Then either the sun cannot be very far off, or else you must have travelled very fast.

"It is far, far, far away; a longer journey than you can possibly imagine. We have travelled swiftly, swiftly—faster than you can think. Perhaps when you have seen an express train sweep through a station without stopping, you have felt half frightened to think how fast it went. That was about forty-five miles an hour. Now fancy a train going *twice* as fast,—ninety miles an hour. Then if it were possible for it to fly up through the sky, straight away without stopping, to the sun, it would take *a million hours*, or more than *one hundred years*, to reach the sun."

And you have done it in eight minutes! Sunbeams, are you not tired with that wonderful journey?

"We are never tired. It would be sad if we were, for we have a great deal of work to do; and if we moved ever so little slower than we do, we should lose our brightness and our warmth, and all our work would be spoiled."

What! have you work to do? I have often heard of Sunbeams playing, but I did not know they worked; I thought they only shone.

"Ask some of your learned men, and they will tell you that we do all the work of the world. That

is a little exaggeration, for we could do nothing if the earth did not also do its work. Every atom which God has made does the work God gives it to do. But it is true that none of the work done in the world would be done without us."

You mean, Sunbeams, that, without you, the world would be dark, and people could not see to do their work.

"We mean much more than that. We bring to your world HEAT as well as light. If we ceased coming for two or three days, the whole globe—land and sea—would be wrapped in a thick armour of ice; and every living creature, plant or animal, would perish. All over the world there would be nothing but ice, darkness, and death."

That is too terrible to think of! But, Sunbeams, at all events we can do without your light and heat at night, when we have warm fires and bright lamps.

"But for us, you would have neither coal for your fires nor gas for your lamps. Do you know what coal is made of? It is made from plants—enormous forests, chiefly of gigantic ferns—which grew and decayed, and turned to coal, long, long ages ago."

But what have sunbeams to do with that? Do not trees grow from their roots, deep down in the dark earth, where sunshine cannot reach them?

“Plants cannot grow without us. Take one of your favourite plants, and put it in a dark closet, where daylight can never reach its leaves, and you will find it will turn pale, and in a short time it will die. For plants grow not only by their roots, through which they suck up moisture from the ground, but by *their leaves*, through which they suck in from the air the food by which their wood is nourished. And this they cannot do without our help. So you see that without sunshine you would have no houses, because there would be no trees from which to make the roofs and floors and doors. Still it is not true to say that we do *all* the work; for if God had not prepared the invisible atoms of carbon, and other kinds of atoms also, to feed the plants, and if each tiny invisible mouth on every leaf did not do its work, all our light and warmth would go for nothing.”

All this is wonderful indeed! Can you tell us, Sunbeams, anything else you do?

“We fill the sky with clouds, and make the winds carry them from place to place to water the

thirsty earth. But for us, there would be neither wind nor rain."

How can such gentle soft things as Sunbeams, which do not hurt our cheek or our eyes as they fall on them, for all they have been flying so swiftly from afar, have power to lift the water from the sea into the sky, and to drive about the mighty winds that can tear up strong oaks by the roots? How heavy one single bucket of water is! What must be the weight of water that falls in a day of rain, over a wide country! How can the gentle Sunbeams lift that into the sky?

"We do not really *lift* it at all. We only *make it warm*; and then, in steam, up it goes into the air and mounts aloft. So, too, we do not *drive* the winds. We only make the air hot in the torrid zone, and then the earth by its own force *pulls down* the cold air, which is heavier, and the hot air rises; just as the light scale of a balance rises when the heavy scale sinks. Then the warm air hastens away to the North and South Poles, while the cold air rushes from the Poles to fill its place, and to be warmed by us in its turn. The earth, too, by turning round every day on her axis, and flying each year round the sun, catches us now on



one side, now on another; in summer on one Pole, in winter on the other. This is the wonderful machinery which God has provided, 'to make the weight for the winds.' Thus He 'weigheth the waters by measure,' and has 'made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder.' " \*

So then, bright, gentle, patient Sunbeams! but for you, no trees or grass or harvests would grow, nor stormy winds and soft breezes blow, nor showers descend or rivers flow. All things in the world would be as useless without you as a huge mill filled with the most wonderful and powerful machinery, without the boiler-fire to make the steam and keep the mighty steam-engine going! Yet with all your work you are never weary, or gloomy, or discontented, but as full of joy and beauty as of busy usefulness. But tell us,—Is there anything else you do?

"We make the world bright and beautiful. We carry with us, invisibly, all colours you can see or think of. The colour on your cheek, and the deep blush of the rose, the blue of the sky, and of the little speedwell, and of Baby's eyes; the lustrous

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\* Job xxviii. 23-28. Compare Prov. viii. 22-30.

white of the lily, and the green of the meadows, and the purple of the moors and mountains; all are our work. We do not paint as the artist paints his picture, laying on his colour once for all and leaving it. We keep bathing with fresh colour whatever we paint, every instant; and our colours are as bright now as when the world was first made. We are the very image of joy; so that when we dart through an opening in the clouds and light up the fields and hills, you call it 'a *smiling* landscape;' and when you see 'any one with a very happy, contented, joyous countenance, you say,—'What a *bright, sunny* face! It is like a sunbeam in the house!' Yet we are never vain of our own brightness and beauty; for we give it all away, and never show ourselves except when we shine on something else."

## II.

Well! is not this a wonderful story the cheerful happy sunbeams have been telling us? As wonderful, is it not, as any fairy tale? And yet it is all true. Now shall we try to see what we can learn from it?

First, how glorious, and wise, and powerful, and

good must GOD be, who said, "Let there be light : and there was light." In that grand "Hymn of Creation" (as it has been called), Psalm civ., we read of God covering Himself "with light as with a garment." That is, we can see the sunshine, but we cannot see God, who is working by it and in it. Glorious as light is, if compared to our Creator, it is but like the robes and veil which conceal the person who wears them, though they show that he is there. In the Bible, knowledge and wisdom, as well as joy and happiness, are compared to light. So, too, is holiness ; and so also the favour and loving-kindness of God. I could give you many texts to show this ; but I would rather you should hunt for them and find them out yourselves.

St. John says, "God is light ; and in Him is no darkness at all." That is, all wisdom, and holiness, and love, belong to God. Darkness is the image, in the Bible, of sin, ignorance, and unhappiness. All these come from not knowing and loving God. The light which our eyes can see, He gives to all men ; "for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good." But to those who seek Him earnestly He gives that better kind of light, of which St. Paul says, "GOD, who commanded the

light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”\*

The prophet Malachi compares the Lord Jesus to the sun, and the blessings of His salvation to sunbeams. “Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings;” that is, in his beams of light and warmth. And so in the description of the perfect and eternal blessedness of Heaven, it is said, “there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light; . . . and the Lamb is the light thereof.”† Is not that enough to make one feel like good John Bunyan, when in his dream he saw the glory of the Heavenly City, just for a moment, through the open gate, as Christian and Hopeful entered? “Which when I had seen (he says) I wished myself among them.”

But meantime, you and I, like the sunbeams, have to do our daily work down here, and to try to make our home and all around us bright and happy. You know though the sunbeams, as they

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\* Matt. v. 45. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

† Mal. iv. 2. Rev. xxii. 5, xxi. 23.

come from the sun, are so glorious that your eye cannot bear their blaze, they are not too proud to light the ploughman at his toil, and the cottage housewife in her washing, and mending, and bread-baking; or to help the daisy to unfold its tiny star, and the wren to build its nest and find food for its young. What does this teach us? Not to despise the humblest, smallest duty. If it is a DUTY, it is the work God gives us, just at that moment, to do. Try to do it faithfully, patiently, cheerfully, as the sunbeams do their work. And when the sunshine falls on your lesson-book, or on your work, or upon your fingers when busied in some little act of kindness for your brother, or sister, or playmate, think that you see God's smile shining on what you are doing.

Another thing the sunbeams teach is, that God loves to make things beautiful, and to see His creatures happy. Even for the tiny gnats and midges the sun shines; and how merry and happy they seem as they dance in it on a summer evening! Perhaps you may ask,—“Do things look beautiful to God as they do to us? Does not the Bible say that ‘the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord

looketh on the heart'? True, and for that very reason, while God can see through the heart and inside of all things, He can also see *how they look to us*. He has made them beautiful, and means their beauty for our delight. But more than that. He means it for a sort of picture or parable of inward beauty;—sweetness, and nobleness, and goodness, and purity, and generosity, and love, and "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." "Whatsoever things are lovely, . . . think on these things."\*

Try to be sunbeams in your own homes. When little troubles and vexations come, try to turn the bright side of your mind, not the dark one, to them. Ask God for a bright, brave, cheerful heart, and try to carry a bright face. What, after all, do you think is the most important work in life? Building houses, or ships? Or ploughing, sowing, and reaping? Or making roads and hedges? Or forging iron? Or digging coal? Or weaving cloth? Or making laws? Or teaching children? Or curing diseases? No. All these are great and needful works. But next to pleasing the Lord (which we

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\* Phil. iv. 8.

are to seek to do in all our works), the greatest and most important work is—HELPING TO MAKE OTHER PEOPLE HAPPY. And it is surprising, if you only try, how much of this work a child may do.

Do you know, the sunshine is again falling on my page, as it did when I began to write,—as if it came to see what I have been writing about it. And the sunbeams, filling the blue heaven with light (though the wild wintry wind is roughly shaking the bare trees), seem to say, “See how fair and bright we can make even a December sky!” And like winter sunshine is a bright, cheerful, loving face in the midst of care and trouble. Some people, when they come into a house or chamber where there is sorrow, or pain and sickness, remind one of the angel who came to Peter in his prison;—“and a light shined in the prison.” I remember once a tiny little girl, whose father was in sore trouble. She was only between three and four years old; but she was very anxious to comfort her father. He took her on his knee, and asked her how she thought such a little girl could help or comfort him. “Oh! *With loving*,” she answered. And she was right. We may call LOVE *the sunshine of the heart*. Ask God that you may have

the sunshine of His love in your own heart; and then that you may be able to have always a loving heart to all around. That is the way to be a sunbeam at home.

Selfish people are not like sunbeams, but like clouds. Whatever light of joy and happiness shines on them, they keep to themselves; not like those bright white clouds which reflect the sunbeams so gloriously that the sky looks twice as bright for their presence; but like those gloomy clouds which hide the light, making the sky dull and earth chill. Selfish people cast a shadow wherever they go; but most of all at home. It is wonderful how much of the sunshine of home one selfish child may darken.

Next to love, CHEERFULNESS is one of the brightest of Home Sunbeams. Fretfulness casts a very disagreeable shadow on everything. And next to cheerfulness, I think, is HELPFULNESS. What a bright little sunbeam those words often are,—“*Let me help you!*” And if sometimes you are discouraged by being told that you cannot help, let me tell you a little proverb which I often repeat to little people,—“Not to hinder, is to help.”

The Lord Jesus said, “I am the Light of the

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World." But you may be sure that before the time came for Him to be the Light of the World He was the Light of His own home at Nazareth. And if He gives us grace to learn of Him and to be like Him, then we, too, shall "shine as lights,"—as His word bids us. Oh! if only every one would try to be like HIM, what a bright, happy world this would soon become! What is it that is wanted in winter time to cover the bare boughs with green leaves again, and fill the fields with flowers, and the woods with the song of merry birds? Only more sunbeams. And so nothing is needed but to have the love of God filling all hearts with its warmth and brightness, and the mind that was in Christ Jesus shining in every one's life, to make every home happy, and Earth a paradise.

Which do you think you are,—and which will you try to be,—Sunshine or Cloud?

Now I am going to finish with A FABLE, the moral of which, if you cannot find out now, perhaps you will find out another day. But I should not wonder if you guess it.

## THE CHILD AND THE SUNBEAM.

"SWEET Sunbeam," said a little child, "pray tell me if you are at play like me, or at work like my father?"

The Sunbeam smiled upon the Child, and answered, "I am hard at work, painting the sky blue and the grass green, and the flowers of a hundred hues."

"Where do you get your paints, Sunbeam?" asked the Child.

"I carry them in my bosom, where I have more lovely colours hidden than any which you behold in sky, or field, or flower."

"Dear Sunbeam," said the Child earnestly, "do let me see those fairest colours, which you hide in your bosom. I long so much to look at them."

"You shall have your wish, Little One," said the Sunbeam.

Then the storm wind arose, and made the trees shiver and bend, and drew a black curtain of cloud across the sky.

"Alas!" said the Child, "the blue sky has vanished, and the green of the meadow has lost

all its brightness, and the flowers are closing their cups. And see! the rain begins to fall, and makes all the prospect dim. Surely the Sunbeam was mocking me."

Then on the dark curtain of cloud shone out a band of loveliest colours, melting softly into each other, faint at first, but growing brighter and brighter, till a glorious double Rainbow, with one foot on the hill and the other low in the valley, spanned the landscape like a fairy arch of triumph.

The child had never in his life seen anything so beautiful. For a little he held his breath to gaze; then he said, "Surely these must be the fairest colours, and the Sunbeam has kept its promise. But if the rain would only clear away, the colours would be brighter still. Melancholy rain! Why do you spoil my prospect?"

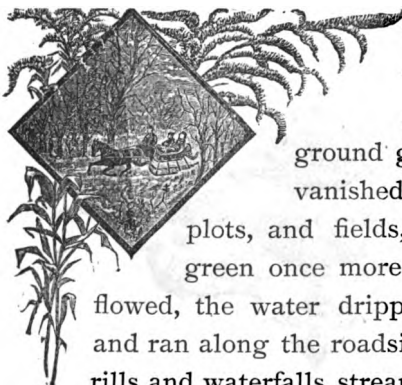
Then the child heard a soft voice which he knew to be that of the Sunbeam, though it no longer shone on his path or on his golden curls:—"Little One! When the rain ceases, the colours will fade. Only on the dark background of the storm, when the rain holds up its looking-glass to me, and I smile through tears, can mortal eyes behold my fairest colours."

The storm ceased. The sky was bluer, the grass greener, the flowers gayer than before. The Sunbeam smiled again upon the Child at his play. But the fair colours had vanished, and were hidden again in the Sunbeam's white bosom.





## THE THAW.



YOU have seen the long hard frost go away. The hard ground grew soft, the snow vanished, and the grass-plots, and fields, and hills looked green once more; the frozen rivers flowed, the water dripped from the roofs and ran along the roadside, and a thousand rills and waterfalls streamed down from the moors and craggy fells. How did it happen? Why did the frost go, and the thaw come?

Two very different answers might be given to this question, yet they are both true. We might say, "It was because the air grew warm; a warm wind blew from the Atlantic Ocean, instead of a

cold wind from the great ice-fields at the North Pole; and so the ice and snow were melted." Or we might say, "It was because God pleased. He sent the frost, and when He saw good He sent the thaw."

Now look at the 18th verse of the 147th Psalm, and you will find *both* these reasons given—

"HE CAUSETH HIS WIND TO BLOW, AND THE  
WATERS FLOW."

I. There are two lessons taught in these words. I am not quite sure if I can make the first of them plain to you. It is this: "GOD WORKS BY MEANS. Perhaps you say, "I don't understand." Well, I daresay some of you remember that when the snow lay thick on the ground you brought in a cupful to melt. Now suppose you had set the cup on a table and said, "Snow, melt!" would it have obeyed your command and melted? No. If it had, we should have said, "It is a miracle!" What did you do? You put the cup before the fire, and the heat melted the snow, and it turned to water. That is what we call *using means*—taking the right way to do things. Now God knows how to do everything, and the *means* He used to melt the

frost away was to let the warm wind blow. Did He use any means to make the wind warm, and to make it blow? Yes. The sun warmed the air near the middle of the earth (between the Tropics, you know), so that it rose up, and the cold air came flowing from the North Pole to fill its place; and the warm air flowed towards the North Pole, and some of it came streaming down on England—a mild south-west wind—and brought the thaw. But why or how it is that the cold north-east wind blows one day, and the warm south-west the next,—that is what even our wisest men cannot tell. God knows; and when He pleases, it is so.

But now see the difference between God's way of working and ours. You put the snow in the cup, and put the cup near the fire; that was all. You did not make the cup, or the earth the cup was made of, or the coal, or even the fireplace. You did not make the snow, with its lovely tiny white crystals, or give power to the warmth to turn it into water; nor did you make the coal able to burn, or the flame able to give heat.

But God made all these. We can only use the means God has given us. God *makes all the means*, and then uses them as He sees good. And if we

ask, "When did God *begin* to *get ready* to make the thaw come?" we must answer, "When He made the earth, and the sun, and the water of the sea, from which the clouds are bred, and made it the nature of water to turn into ice and snow with cold, and to melt back to water when the warm air breathes on it."

God is not *obliged* to work by means. It would be foolish to think so. Sometimes, as we learn from the Bible, He is pleased to work *miracles*, just to show us His power, and teach us that all things obey His will. But that is very seldom. Most things God does by using the proper means; not because He is obliged, but because it is the best and wisest plan, and He has made all things on purpose.

II. Then the second lesson this verse teaches us is that all THINGS DO GOD'S WILL, just as much as if He did everything by miracle. Read verses 15, 16, 17, 18. Notice it is "HIS ice," "HIS cold," "HIS wind." All belong to Him because He made all things. Look also at verse 8; and try if you can find some other texts in the Psalms which tell us that all things were made by God's



word (that is, God's thought and will), and obey Him, and are all His servants.

Yes, all things obey God perpetually and continually. All THINGS. But do all PEOPLE? Do you? Can you say that you obey all that God tells you in His word as swiftly and as perfectly as the snow melts before the fire? Alas! No. Nobody can say this; for even when we try our best to please God we find that we fail, and our obedience is imperfect; just as if the snow were only half to melt, and be all mixed up with little bits of warm ice that refused to melt. All THINGS obey God perfectly; but you are not a THING but a PERSON, and so God has given you this wonderful power, that you can if you choose disobey Him. You can refuse the good and love the evil; neglect the right and do the wrong. Why is this? Is it because God does not care about your obeying Him, as much as He cares about the wind and the snow? No, but because He cares a great deal more. He wishes you to obey Him, not as the snow, and wind, and clouds, and sunshine obey Him, because they cannot help it; but willingly, because you love Him.

“But if I cannot obey Him perfectly, even if

I try, and sometimes feel as if I could not even try, what then?" Why you must ask God to "work in you both to will and to do," and to let the breath of His Holy Spirit breathe in your heart till all the ice of carelessness and disobedience is melted, and your heart flows out in sorrow for ever sinning against God, and in warm, happy love to Him, and to the Lord Jesus. Pray that God will keep the frost out of your heart!





## THE BUILDERS.



PARABLES are like caskets containing precious jewels. The casket keeps the jewel safe, but hides it, and must be opened before you can see it.

Just so, a parable hides the lesson it is meant to teach, and needs explanation; but it takes care of it too, because the parable is easily remembered even if you do not understand its hidden meaning. Our Saviour, therefore, made great use of parables. Of many of His hearers He said that having eyes

they saw not, and having ears they heard not, neither did they understand His teaching. Yet He knew that His beautiful parables would remain fixed in their memory, until some day the finger of God's Spirit would touch the secret spring, open the casket, and reveal the hidden jewel of truth. And just as, if you would not lose the precious jewel, the first thing is to take great care of the casket in which it is shut up, so if you would understand the true meaning of one of our Lord's parables, the first thing is to study carefully its story or picture. For some parables are stories, like that of the Prodigal Son; some are pictures or comparisons, like that of the Lost Sheep, only they are not like painted or printed pictures, but rather like the moving pictures in a *camera obscura*.

The first of our Saviour's parables recorded in the Gospels, is like two pictures set side by side in one frame. It is the parable of the Two Builders. (See Matt. vii. 24-27; Luke vi. 47-49. Let us look first at the First Picture.

### **The Two Houses in Building.**

WE look upon a pleasant valley, through the midst of which a stream flows towards the sea.

On either hand rise green hills, ridge beyond ridge, like huge steps leading up to the grey mountain tops. The long grass waves gently in the peaceful summer sunshine. The sky is blue, without one fleck of cloud. The mountains seem to stand like sentinels, ranged in line, to guard the valley from danger. You can almost fancy they smile as they look down on the pastures, dotted over with white sheep, and on the greener meadows below, where the cattle are feeding. The stream flows quietly along, making pleasant music among the stones, between wide dry banks of pebbles and sand. All is bright, calm, peaceful.

By the margin of the stream you see labourers at work, among piles of timber, and stones, and clay. One man is overlooking and directing the work. They have chosen a level sandy spot, free from stones, and marked out the shape of a house upon it. They lay the great stones on the flat surface of the ground. They build up the walls outside with stone, inside with clay and earth. The building rises apace—a large, square, one-storied house, such as they build in eastern lands. The beams for the flat roof are laid across the top, and covered with twigs or heath, and clay and

plaster, beaten hard and smooth. So at last the dwelling is finished. It looks strong and safe. Nobody can see that it has no foundation; and the builder flatters himself that it will stand well enough. "*It will last my time,*" he says.

Now look again. Somewhat higher up the valley is another builder, with his party of labourers, also putting up a house. But he goes to work in another fashion. He makes his men dig patiently through the grass and sand and clay till they reach the solid rock. There they lay the foundation stones, firm and strong, almost like part of the rock itself. This house takes much longer in building than the first; but at last it, too, is complete. The two builders take up their abode in the two houses; and, to look at them, one seems as good as the other. No one can see that one has a foundation, and the other none. This is our first picture—The Two Houses in Building.

Now let us look at the Second Picture.

### **The Two Houses in the Storm.**

THE calm, bright summer has glided swiftly by. Stormy autumn has come. A change is passing

over the peaceful little valley. Thick black clouds hide the mountain tops, and droop their ragged edges far down the hill sides. Lightning flashes, and crashing peals of thunder echo and re-echo from glen to glen. Now the wind rises, at first in heavy sobs and gusts, then sweeping furiously through all the mountain gorges. Every creature that has a home to flee to—men, beasts, birds, all seek some refuge from the wrath of the bursting storm. The rain pours down—not such rain as we in England are accustomed to see, but in great spouts and gushes, as though ten thousand waterfalls were descending from the sky. Soon the hill-sides are streaming, and a torrent rushes foaming down every glen. Now look at the river, which in summer time murmured so pleasantly among the stones of its bed, between its wide, dry banks. See how fast it rises, as the torrents all pour their muddy, frothing waters into it. See how it dashes and whirls and roars and foams, grinding the huge stones against one another. Higher and higher, faster and faster! Now it fills its whole channel. It overflows its banks. It spreads in a foaming flood along the valley. The wind drives the waves fiercely along. You cannot tell which roars

the loudest—the thunder, the wind, or the raging waters.

Look at the Two Houses now! Both are surrounded with the rising flood. That which is built on the rock, though it trembles under the force of the storm, stands safe and firm. Firm and safe it will still stand, when the tempest is over and the sky clear, and the stream has shrunk back into its channel. But how about the other? The furious current washes the sand away from under one corner, and swiftly undermines the whole side of the building. The unhappy builder looks despairingly forth to see if escape is possible; but no! Nothing can live in those wild waters. The flood is rising inside his house as well as outside. Oh! if he had but been wise in time! O that he had hearkened to those who warned him that if he built on the sand it would be his ruin! He repents, but it is too late. His repentance, like Esau's, finds no room. A few minutes more of terror, anguish, vain regret, and self-reproach, despair. Minutes? They seem hours; and yet how soon they are gone! See! With one horrible crash the house falls, the waves burst and roar over the place where it stood; and the miserable builder's

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body, crushed and mangled, is whirled down the flood among the broken, scattered timbers of his habitation.

These are the two pictures or similitudes which our Saviour sets before us in the first of all His recorded parables. Let us now try to open the casket and look at the hidden jewel. Let us try to discover what are the lessons we are to learn from the parable.

I. WE ARE ALL OF US BUILDERS. Let me show you one or two more pictures, to explain what I mean.

A quiet, bright girl is sitting at work in a cottage by her mother's side; ready, with cheerful promptness, to run on an errand, to spread the table, to fetch her little brother from school, or to teach and amuse the younger children. Is she building anything? Many things. For one thing, *a feeling of trust* in her mother's heart. Years hence, when that mother is stricken down with sickness, she will not have to say with a sigh, "Jane means well, but I can't trust her." She will say, "I can trust you, my child, to do all that I have been used to do,—all that you know I should wish."

A brother and sister are sitting together by the fireside, listening to their father's teaching, to their mother's sweet voice reading aloud: they repeat the same hymns; they turn over the leaves of one book; they kneel side by side at family prayer. What are they building? A happy, holy *chamber of memory*, of which they two alone will have the key. Long years hence, when he is in Australia, and she is living with strangers, and father and mother are both gone to the Better Land, their thoughts will often meet in that sweet chamber of memory, and in their letters they will say to one another: "Do you remember that Sunday evening, when mother read to us about Luther's school days," or "when father explained about 'this poor man cried and the Lord heard him,'" or "when we sang for the first time '*Just as I am*'?" Then they will learn, what children can never know while they are children—how precious a thing it is to have a happy *Past*, full of loving and holy thoughts, stored up in our memory, like pictures of pleasant summer landscapes hanging round our parlour walls, which cheer our eyes when frost and storm and gloom are outside.

Ah! but what a sad thing it is to store up

the bitter memory of an evil, ill-spent past! Here is a lad giving way to selfishness, ill-temper, sloth and idleness, disobedience and undutifulness. What is *he* building, think you? A nest in his own heart, into which a whole brood of serpents will creep, which presently will come forth to sting others, and one day will sting him to death. But may he not repent and be changed? Through the great mercy of God, he may; but he can never undo the past, never recall one wasted day, never unsay one unkind or undutiful speech, never cast out from his mind one hateful, remorseful remembrance. The monuments of memory are strongly built, and the inscriptions on them deeply and legibly cut, for they are meant to last for eternity; and, though they often get covered with that dust which we call forgetfulness, the breath of death, I believe, will blow that dust away, and all that has ever been built and graven in our memory will be there for ever.

Shall we look at one or two other builders? A grave, bright-eyed boy is sitting before a fire, earnestly watching the bubbling, hissing, steaming tea-kettle, and thinking, thinking, thinking. What is he building? Neither he nor any one else can

guess; but in truth he is building things as wonderful as the enchanted castles and palaces of the genii in fairy-tales. Steam-engines, steam-boats, locomotives, with their long trains of railway carriages, and the long lines of railway made for them to run on: all these are, in time, to grow out of the THOUGHT which that boy is building in his busy brain. All the steam-engines that ever will be built were wrapped up, like a forest of oaks in a single acorn, in the first thought of the steam-engine in the mind of James Watt. For, let me tell you (though I scarcely expect you to understand it), of all that men build in granite, or marble, or iron, or whatever else they please, nothing is so strong and lasting as thought. The pyramids themselves might be blown up and shattered into fragments, but what power could destroy the twenty-third Psalm? If all the books in the world were burned, yet the thoughts and words of David would remain in hundreds of thousands of memories, and parents would teach them to their children while the world lasts. Or what say you to the thought of the man who first invented a ploughshare, or a wheel, or a loom, or a pen? Nobody can tell the names of those

inventors, or when or where they lived. But their thoughts are at work and bearing fruit wherever harvests are being reaped, or machinery running, or cloth being woven, or books being written;— and will be, to the end of the world.

People are often building something quite different from what they fancy. Here is a man with his head full of all sorts of schemes for getting money. He cares not how dishonest they are, if only they are clever and successful. What does he think he is building? An enormous fortune, with which he is to live for long years, that will fly merrily by in luxury and splendour. What is he really building? A prison, in which those long years will drag slowly along in shame and wretchedness, the just reward of his knavery.

Here is another man of business, no less busily engaged in earning money, but in a fair, honourable way. He is throwing his time, thought, ease, health, his very life, into his business. Ask him what he is building. "What am I building, my young friend? I am building, first, a handsome fortune, and then a handsome mansion, in a fine park, where I may, when I please, retire from business, and spend a quiet old age." Alas! No.

He is only building for himself a costly sepulchre. Soon he will have built into it his last day of health and strength; and then death will come and say: "It is for ME you have been working; now give me all you have, and follow me to the land to which I am sent to lead you."

Thus, wisely or foolishly, for good or for evil, *we are all of us builders*—building many things—always building. But there is one principal building on which every one of us is constantly busy, which grows every hour, and which must last in some shape or other, either as a fair temple which God himself will dwell in, or as a shattered, blackened ruin, for ever. This wonderful building is YOUR OWN LIFE. Every word, and deed, and even thought, is the laying of a stone or the fixing of a timber. Habits are the stiff cement and strong fastenings by which all is bound together. Every day sees a course laid, or an arch turned, or a fresh portion of the building marked out; and year by year the building shows more and more of the shape it will have when finished.

Some men's lives are like palaces, fair and spacious and lofty; full of nobleness. Some are like castles, grim and stern and tyrannical, with

dark cells and secret winding passages. Some are like mills and warehouses, stuffed so full with machinery and merchandise that the owner has scarce room to move about; and not a glimpse of the bright blue sky can he catch through their dusty windows. Some, again, are lighthouses, standing bravely on their rock amid the dashing waves, and holding forth the light by which many a storm-tost voyager is guided into port. Some lives are more like ships than houses, ever wandering, nowhere abiding. Some are like quiet cottage homes, with no splendid outside or towering pinnacles, but full of homely peace and quiet usefulness. And some—how many!—never get beyond the beginning: just a few courses laid; oftentimes of such fair stones, so fitly placed, that we weep over them and say, “What would this sweet young life have grown to, if only it had not been cut short so early!” Very bitter our sorrow would be did we not remember that the eye of the Lord is upon those few stones, and that His hand will gather them and lay them on the One Living Foundation, and build them into a fairer structure than ever could have been reared in this sinful and therefore sorrowful world,—a lovely, happy, perfect life in

the light of His own presence. For JESUS has said: "This is the FATHER'S will who hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

Some persons go on building for fifty, sixty, or seventy years, and after all have nothing to show worth calling a life—nothing but lost time, wasted materials, and a heap of ruins. Build as we may, well or ill, wisely or foolishly, on the rock or on the sand, presently the Angel of Death will come, and with those long, strong arms of his, which can reach up to heaven or down to hell, he will lift up from the earth what we have built, leaving behind the *scaffolding*—I mean our body—and will set it before the judgment-seat of Christ, and say, "This is what such-an-one has made of his life." "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

II. IF WE WOULD BUILD SAFELY AND WELL, WE MUST BUILD ON A RIGHT FOUNDATION.

You know it is so even in small things. If you are going to paint a picture, and get the outline



wrong (which is the foundation of the picture), all the picture will be wrong. If you have a long division sum to do, and make a mistake in the first step, all the sum will be wrong. A child soon learns that he cannot even build a card house on a shining, polished table, or on a crooked rickety table; or a house of toy bricks without a firm level foundation. How much more must this be so in greater matters! I have seen a church—a handsome building with a lofty tower—where just as they were beginning to build on what seemed a solid foundation, they discovered, on digging a little deeper down, a bed of miry shale. Suppose they had gone on building, what would have happened? Presently the ground would have sunk under the weight of the building; the strong walls would have begun to bulge and crack, and the lofty steeple would have leant all awry, and probably would have come down with a crash, and nothing would have remained of the noble building but a heap of ruins.

The want of a good foundation, the fatal mischief of a bad one, does not always show at once. But sooner or later the hour of trial comes. The house on the sand stood as well as the house on

the rock as long as fine weather lasted ; but when the tempest raged and the storm beat vehemently against it, "it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Sometimes it is the temptations of worldly companionship and influence which try our foundation. Two young lads who have been brought up in Christian homes, who have worshipped in the same house of prayer, sat as scholars, and then as teachers, in the same Sunday-school, and whose conduct has so far been equally satisfactory and promising, leave their homes to take situations in the same house of business. They find themselves amongst a number of ungodly companions, some of them actually hating religion, and the rest careless about it. One of these lads, the night after his arrival, on going up to the bed-room in which several others of the young men are to sleep also, kneels down, as he has been used to do, by his bedside, to pray. The others begin at once to laugh, to cough, or to say in loud mocking whispers, "Oh ! don't disturb him, he's so pious !" He hurries through his prayer, with no real heart or earnestness, and his tormentors, seeing him look ashamed and vexed, laugh louder ; ask him whether his mother always comes to hear him say his prayers

and to tuck him up in bed; and with a score of silly profane jests make sport of his devotions. It is a hard trial, no doubt; but he ought to feel that there is nothing to be ashamed of in showing our love and duty to our Father in Heaven, and to our Saviour: the shame lies all the other way. He ought to seek strength and courage, and they would be given him. He ought to remember that Christ has said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." Poor weak, foolish fellow! he takes refuge in the thought that he can say his prayers just as well in bed; but this cowardly refuge soon fails: before long, the habit of his childhood is broken, and he neglects prayer altogether. Next Sunday, the weather is temptingly fine. His companions tell him that wet Sundays are good enough to go to church on; they are going out for a day's pleasure, and he must go with them. His conscience makes a faint struggle; but he yields. He is too uncomfortable all day, thinking of his home and of how the day is being spent there, really to enjoy the day's pleasure. He resolves, or half resolves, to

be more firm next time. But when the temptation comes again, it is so strongly urged that he yields again. His scruples vanish. In a month or two, he has become an habitual neglecter of public worship, as well as of private prayer. His evil companions tell him that no one can be a man who does not drink, and smoke, and gamble; and, though he hates these things, he does not like to be singular, cannot stand being laughed at; and by and by he loves them. He wastes his time, his money, his health, his brains, his character. He walks in the counsel of the ungodly, stands in the way of sinners, and before long he will be found sitting in the seat of the scornful. If any one had said to him, the New Year's day before he left home, "Next New Year's day will find you prayerless, godless, profane, not over honest, a companion of sots, gamblers, and profligates, and on the way to become as vile as the vilest," what would he have said? He would never have believed it. Yet so it is; and why? Look at that other young man who left home at the same time. He has been exposed to exactly the same temptations. Yet his place in the house of prayer is never empty. He has taken a class in the Sunday-school. His

ungodly house-mates have given over persecuting him, and have learned to respect him. And why? What makes the difference? Just this: *the one had a foundation; the other had none.*

Sometimes it is sorrow that tries our foundation. A young, warm-hearted girl, in a happy home, thinks the world is all bright. She has heard of sorrow, but it has never come near her, and it seems unreal—a shadow that need not dim the sunshine of her happiness. People talk in her hearing about sin, and preachers preach of it; but she thinks she has never done anything particularly wrong, and feels no burden on her conscience. By and by she is happily married. All goes well. Like David in his prosperity, she thinks “I shall never be moved.” But after a few bright happy years her darling little son, her only child, falls sick and dies. Now, all is wrong. The whole world is darkened, and her own home seems the darkest spot in it. God seems to her unkind, nay, even unjust—the most dreadful thought which it is possible for any one to have—because He has taken her darling child to Himself. All the blessed promises of the Bible give her not one ray of comfort. How is this? It is because *she had no foundation.*

Sometimes the trial comes in the form, not of adversity, but of prosperity; just as the snow houses they build in Lapland, which stand firm against the winter's rage, melt away in the summer sunshine. I have seen a young man who, when he was fighting his way up from the bottom step of the ladder, with an income which just sufficed for himself and his young wife in their pleasant country cottage, seemed to be an earnest, frank, simple-hearted Christian. Possessed of uncommon abilities, and of manners which could both win and command, he rose steadily in his profession; became the head of an extensive business; gathered money by handfals. But as he rose in the world, his religion melted away; it dried up; even his moral principles began to crack and give way; his honour and honesty became very questionable; his good name was tarnished. If he had still professed to be a religious man, even worldly men would have cried out against him as a hypocrite; and good men, who remembered him in his humbler but happier days, thought sorrowfully: "*He had no foundation.*"

Yet again: it is sometimes sickness which searches out the hidden weakness of the foundation

on which our life and hope are resting—hidden, during health, both from others and from ourselves. One who had for long years attended the house of God, said to me on his death-bed: “Mr. D—— had no more attentive hearer than myself; and when I had listened to the prayers and the sermon, I thought I had done my duty, and was all right: but now I find I AM ALL WRONG.” Poor man! he lived for some months longer; and I trust that, late as it was, God did enable him to see the true foundation, and to build there. But a death-bed, to which so many trust as the opportunity for repentance, is commonly the worst place in the world for it. And what must it be, like the foolish builder in the parable, to find out that you have no foundation only when you are sinking into ruin and feel that it is too late!

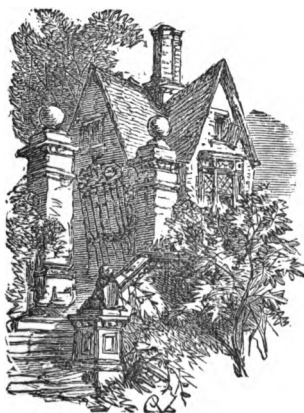
What, then, is THE FOUNDATION on which our life is to be built—so firm, that it will bear all the weight we can put upon it; so broad, that we may build on it our trust, hope, love, duty, our whole life; so near, that you may build on it at once; so free, that you may, without fear, make it your own; so enduring, that it will last for ever?

JESUS answers: “Whosoever cometh to Me,

and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, . . . is like a man who built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

The Apostle Paul answers: "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is JESUS CHRIST."

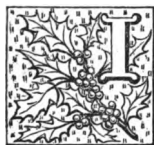
GOD answers: "Behold I lay in Zion a Chief Corner Stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded."







## ROAD MAKING.



IN ancient times, especially in Eastern lands, when an emperor or king was travelling through his dominions, or perhaps a queen, or prince, or princess going on a long journey, men were sent before them to prepare the way. Sometimes they had to make a new road through pathless wildernesses and rocky passes, hewing down trees, cutting a level way along steep or rugged hill-sides, clearing away rocks, and making embankments across valleys and bridges over streams. Or sometimes the old road was overgrown with bushes and brambles, or washed away by floods, or covered with rubbish which the winter storms and swollen torrents had brought down from the mountains. In some Eastern lands, even at this day, travellers tell us how the roads are often destroyed in the

rainy season, so that before a governor or high officer of state makes a journey, the highways must be mended and made ready for him to travel speedily and safely.

So, when the prophet Isaiah was speaking of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Saviour and King of men, he foretold that someone would be sent by God to "prepare the way of the Lord," and "make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Look at the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, especially verses 3-5, 10, 11, and you will see what he says. Then look at Matt. iii. 1-3, and Mark i. 1-4, and you will see that the messenger whom God sent to prepare the way for His beloved Son was John the Baptist. John the Baptist, when asked who he was, said the same of himself. (See John i. 22, 23.)

Now, *how* did John prepare the way and make the path straight for the coming of the Lord Jesus? The angel who foretold his birth said of him, "He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; TO MAKE READY A PEOPLE PREPARED FOR THE LORD." (Luke i. 16, 17.) And the evangelist

John tells us that God sent him "to bear witness of the Light"—that is, of the Lord Jesus—"that all men through Him might believe" (John i. 6-9, 15, 26, 27). There were *four things* which John taught the people, in order to make their hearts ready for the Lord Jesus. *First*, to expect Him. *Secondly*, to feel their need of Him to save them from their sins. *Thirdly*, to repent of all sin. *Lastly*, to hearken to Him, and believe, love, and obey Him when He came.

Now, if the Lord Jesus were coming to the place where you live—your own town, or city, or village; not in the sky with His angels, as He will come in the Great Day, but just as He used to pass through the towns and villages in Judæa and Galilee,—would not you be very glad if you were invited to help to prepare the way for Him and "make His paths straight"? Would not you think it a great honour and happiness only to take one stone out of His way; especially if you knew that He would know you had done it, and smile on you, and thank you? Oh yes! your heart would dance for joy, and perhaps your feet too. Who would not like to be a pioneer for the Lord Jesus, the King of kings!

Well, but don't you know that He really wishes to come,—not to pass along the roads and streets, but to come into the homes of all the people, and into their hearts; not to pay a visit, but to dwell there? See what He has said Himself in John xiv. 18, 21, 23; and in Rev. iii. 20. Then what hinders His coming? Only that people are not *ready* for Him, do not want Him, do not believe in Him. I suppose nobody is so wicked that he would dare to shut the *door of his house* against the Lord Jesus, if he could see Him coming and hear Him knocking. But people do what is quite as bad: they keep the *door of their hearts* shut against Him. "People!" What people? Well, are you sure some of you boys and girls, to whom I am talking, are not doing this?

Do you know what God calls a heart that does not love and fear Him? A "*stony heart*" (Ezek. xxxvi. 26). And He promises to take away the stony heart, and give a *heart of flesh*; that means, a heart to love and fear Him. Well, then, if you do not love, and trust, and try to obey the Lord Jesus as your own Saviour and King, and your Friend too, who loves you better than any one else can, don't you see there is *one stone* to be

taken out of His way? How? Just by coming to Him in prayer to make you truly His.

Did you ever think that if *you* begin to love and serve the Lord *you will count for two*? If I have my two hands full of marbles, seven in each hand, and take one marble out of one hand into the other, I have now *eight* in one and only *six* in the other: *two* more, you see. So every one who really repents of sin and believes in Christ makes *one fewer* to hinder His kingdom, and *one more* to help it. That makes a difference, you see, of TWO.

Every one must either hinder or help. (See Luke xi. 23.) Which do you mean to do?





## THE CHILD OF PRAYER.



THE Bible reminds me of a spring on a mountain side. That fountain has been flowing for thousands and thousands of years. It is as old as the old grey rocks in whose cool shade it wells up. Yet the water is always fresh, always flowing. So the Bible histories, though written thousands of years ago, never seem to grow old. Often as we have heard or read them, we can always find in them something new.

Almost every child who knows any Bible stories, knows the story of the Child SAMUEL, whom the LORD called to be a prophet when he was but a little boy, and who grew up to be one of the wisest and best men who have ever lived. You know the story, do you not? Well, let us

have a talk about it. Perhaps we shall find out some things you have not thought of before.

I. The first thing we are told concerning Samuel is that he was the CHILD OF PRAYER. His mother prayed that she might have a son, and GOD heard her prayer. Whoever might doubt whether God hears prayer, Samuel's parents could never doubt it. Samuel himself could never doubt it. His very name signifies, in Hebrew, "*Heard of God*,"—that is, given by God in answer to prayer.

Among the ancient Hebrews it was counted a great calamity for married people to have no children. People thought it showed that God was displeased. Some think this was because every Jewish woman hoped she might become the mother of the Messiah, the promised Saviour. This, however, is not very likely. A simpler explanation is, that as each family had its own portion of land to till, those families were best off which had a goodly number of strong, industrious sons, to help the father in tilling the ground and tending the flock; and of active, dutiful daughters, to share the housework with their mother. Those who had no children must hire servants or buy slaves to do their work. Another reason was, that at any time all

the men of suitable age might be called to fight in defence of their country and homes ; and it was counted a great honour for a father to have many brave sons whom he could lead or send to battle. You remember that Jesse, David's father, had eight sons, three of whom were in Saul's army.

So when Hannah and her husband Elkanah had been married a good many years, and she had no child, they were deeply grieved and disappointed. More troubled, perhaps, Hannah was than she ought to have been ; for when she went with her husband to worship in the Tabernacle at Shiloh, and ought according to the law to have feasted upon the thank-offering, praising God for His goodness, "she wept, and did not eat." This one trouble swallowed up all her joy. But at any rate she did the best and wisest thing with her trouble,—what we should do with every trouble, great or small, in order that we may either be delivered from it, or have patience and courage given to bear it. She took it to God in prayer. "She was in bitterness of soul, and wept sore, and she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts ! if Thou wilt indeed look upon the affliction of Thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thine



handmaid, but wilt give unto Thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life." No ear but God's could hear her prayer. "She spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." But so earnest was she—her tears rolling down, and her frame trembling as her lips moved silently—that Eli the high priest was afraid she had been drinking too much of the wine of the sacrifice. "And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord; I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord."

This is prayer indeed,—*pouring out the soul before the Lord!* The most beautiful form of prayer would have been of no use just then to Hannah. Some forms of prayer are very excellent, and very useful in their way and place. If you put your heart and soul into a form of prayer, that is real prayer. If you are using your own words, but do not really mean what you say, that is not real prayer, but mere mockery. But after all, there is no prayer like that which comes fresh from the heart, even if we do not know how rightly to put it into words. The most remarkable prayers

recorded in Scripture—prayers which received remarkable and distinct answers—were of this sort; asking God for what was wanted, with full expectation that if it were right and wise He would grant it.

We must never forget that condition,—*if it be right and wise*: in other words, if it be according to God's will. We must not even wish that God would grant any request which He sees to be wrong or foolish. I doubt not God had put it into Hannah's heart to be thus specially earnest, because He meant to grant her prayer. So when her little son was born, she called him SAMUEL,—“*Heard of God.*”

II. The next remarkable thing in Samuel's history is, that he was GIVEN TO THE SERVICE OF GOD while yet a little child. As he was of the tribe of Levi, he would have been bound to take his turn in the public service of God's house, helping the priests in their sacred ministry, when he grew up.\* But his mother could not be content for him to wait until then. She wished God's

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\* See the pedigree of Samuel in 1 Chron. vi. 33-38; where his name is spelt (as in Hebrew) *Shemuel*.

house to be Samuel's home from his early childhood, so that when he grew up he might not be able to remember the time when he did not serve God. God's House at that time was the Tabernacle. The Temple was not built till about a hundred years afterwards. As soon as little Samuel was able to do without his mother's daily care,—which might be when he was three years old,—she brought him to the high priest Eli, at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was. Elkanah, Samuel's father, brought with him a liberal present,—three bullocks, a bushel of flour, and a goat-skin full of wine. Then they brought the child to Eli, and Hannah said, "Oh, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD. For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD." So "Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod." That is, he was dressed like a little priest; and learned by degrees to fulfil such simple duties as Eli thought suitable to his age—lighting and trimming the lamps, opening and closing the doors, and the like. "Moreover his mother made

him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice . . . And the child Samuel grew before the LORD."

Samuel could not have been given to God's service in this particular way, had his father not belonged to the tribe of Levi. None but Aaron's family could be priests, and none but Levites could help the priests in their holy ministry. But now that the Gospel has come in place of the old Jewish Law, the earthly temple, priests, and sacrifices are all done away, because Christ has offered the One Real Sacrifice, and has entered as our Priest into Heaven. Christian ministers, therefore, are not priests, but teachers. All true Christians are called 'priests' in the New Testament,\*—that is, all are called to be alike holy, alike near to God, and to serve Him continually; some in the ministry of the Gospel, or other special kinds of usefulness, but all in daily living to His glory. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The true Temple is Heaven, where Jesus dwells, and God's glory is manifested. There all who have washed their robes and made them

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\* 1 Peter ii. 9; Rev. v. 9, 10.

white in the blood of the Lamb, will have a place, as it is written, "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." . . . "And His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face."\*

III. The next great event in Samuel's history is just what might be expected: GOD CALLED SAMUEL to His service. His parents gave him to the LORD, and the LORD accepted their gift. He did more. As if a poor man should offer to a king a precious stone which he has found on the sea shore; and the king, instead of merely putting it among his common treasures, should have it carefully polished and set in his crown: so God put honour on the child of Elkanah and Hannah, such as they never dreamed of. They had thought only of giving their boy to a humble, quiet life of service in the Tabernacle, where, when he should grow up, he would take his place among his brother Levites. God called him to such service as very few men in the whole history of the world have been honoured to render; and gave

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\* 1 Cor. x. 31; Rev. vii. 14, 15; xxii. 3, 4.

him a name side by side with that of Moses, among the greatest of His prophets.\*

GOD CALLED SAMUEL EARLY. The Scripture does not tell us how old he was when God spoke to him, and gave him his sad and solemn message to good old Eli. The Jewish historian Josephus says he was twelve years old,—just the age, you remember, at which Our Saviour paid His first visit to the Temple. This was very young to be a Prophet. Moses had to wait till he was eighty years old, before God saw fit to send him to deliver Israel. The Lord Jesus gave a wonderful example of patience and humility, by living quietly at home till he was thirty years old,—the age at which Joseph was promoted to rule over Egypt, and David to be king over Israel. But God had wise reasons for beginning to employ Samuel as His prophet while yet a child. Perhaps one reason was to humble the pride of such ungodly priests as Eli's wicked sons; and another, to show that it is not human wisdom, but God's Spirit, that makes a prophet. No doubt God gave him at first short and simple messages, like that to Eli—though that was one of the most sorrowful he had

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\* Jer. xv. 2; Psalm xcix. 6.

to deliver,—and trained him by degrees for the great work of his life.

So “Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.” How his parents must have wondered when they heard this! The boy-prophet found himself looked up to, and his counsel sought by the oldest, wisest, bravest men in the land. Great humility was needed to bear such honour meekly; to feel that he was but God’s servant and messenger, and not to grow vain, conceited and self-glorious. As young plants need shade, and wither if the scorching sun shines full on them, so it is commonly dangerous for young persons to come out early into the glare of public notice. But God, who called Samuel to this high office, fitted him for it, you may be sure, by giving him true humility; for it is written that “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.”

Sometimes it pleases God to take men whose youth was ill-spent and ungodly, and make them burning and shining lights in His Church. Augustine, John Bunyan, George Whitfield, John Newton,

are remarkable instances. But these are exceptions. The rule is, that God calls early those whom He honours to serve Him greatly. Timothy, Origen, Luther, Howe, Owen, Baxter, John and Charles Wesley, Robert Hall, and Robert Moffatt, are examples of a vast host of faithful soldiers of Christ, who being dedicated to Him in the prayers of godly parents, never wore any colours but their King's, and had the infinite honour of spending an unbroken life in His service.

Thrice happy those whom God calls early to know, and love, and serve Him! The years of childhood and youth are like the precious morning hours. If you would have a well-spent day, you must be up betimes. They are like the sweet Spring-time. If the gardener or husbandman neglects his work in Spring, he will rue his folly, but cannot repair it when rosy Summer comes with her fruit-basket, and sun-burnt Autumn with his golden sickle. The Germans have a proverb,—“Well begun is half-way won”; and this is true of life. The voice of heavenly Wisdom says, “I love them that love Me, and they that seek Me early shall find Me.”

God called Samuel BY NAME. How different



your own name sounds to you from any other word ! How pleasant on lips you love ! As you grow older, fewer voices will call you by your Christian name—your home-name. Fewer and fewer as years roll on. Perhaps in some distant part of the world, long years hence, you will hear of the death of some old schoolfellow, and say, with a sorrowful sigh,—“There is no one now to call me by my old name.” But God says to every one of His children, “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine.” The Bible gives many examples of God calling people by name, when He had some promise to make to them, or some work for them to do. See how many you can find.

I have heard a pretty story of a little girl who was glad her mother prayed for her by name; “because,” said she, “the Lord Jesus will know my name when I go to Heaven.” But she need not have been afraid He would not know it; for He is the Good Shepherd, who has said of Himself, “the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name.”

Unless you feel that God is calling you by name, and speaking to you,—not with a voice

that you can hear with your ears, as Samuel did, but quite as really, in the messages of His word, and by His Spirit's soft, still voice in your heart,—all you hear about God from others will do you little good. He knows you better than your friends know you,—better than you know yourself; thinks of you as much as though He had no one else in the world to think of; and loves you better than father, mother, sisters, brothers, friends, all put together. He invites you to say to Him,—“My Father, be Thou the Guide of my youth!”—and to say of His dear Son our Saviour,—“He loved ME, and gave Himself for ME!”

It was John Wesley, I believe, who said, “I had rather read that text,—‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life,’—than read my own name in the Bible; because that might mean some other ‘John Wesley,’ *but* ‘WHOSOEVER’ *must mean ME.*”

God called SAMUEL VERY GENTLY AND PATIENTLY. Not in a voice of thunder, like that which made even Moses tremble, when the Israelites said, “Let not God speak to us, lest we die.” But in a gentle, kind, father-like tone, which the

boy mistook for the voice of good, kind old Eli. Not a voice from heaven like that which Abraham heard, but close beside his bed. This is what is meant when it is said, "the LORD *came and stood* and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel!" It sounded like some one quite close, speaking softly. How patiently, too, these calls were repeated! Four times the LORD called him, never chiding him for his mistakes; till at last, when Samuel knew it was the LORD, he did not feel frightened, but was ready to say, "Speak, LORD, for Thy servant heareth."

Even thus gently, patiently, repeatedly, does God call you to give your heart to Him. By how many voices! By the voices of parents, teachers, ministers. By the lessons of His providence. By the promises, the precepts, the examples, the warnings of His word. By the voice of His Spirit, who says, "TO-DAY, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts!" "Behold, NOW is the accepted time: behold, NOW is the day of salvation."

There is a great deal more that I should like to say to you about Samuel. I should like to show you how our own homes may be as holy places as the Temple itself; how in your every-day life, at

home, at school, in your work, in your play, you may be as truly serving God as young Samuel was in the Lord's house. I should like, too, to speak of Samuel's after life, and how God honoured him even to a good old age; so that when he died, the whole nation gathered at his funeral to mourn his loss. But lest I should weary you, I will finish with a little parable.

#### THE TWO CHERRY-TREES.

Two little boys, brothers, had each of them a young fruit-tree, given to them by their father, who loved them dearly. One year, two, three years, they waited and watched; and then, to their joy, the two trees were covered with white blossoms; next with young green fruit; and in due time, with a fair show of rich, ripe, dark crimson cherries: enough on each for a handsome dish of fruit. The brothers agreed to gather this, their first crop of fruit, and present it to their father on his birthday, which was close at hand. Soon one basket was filled, and its owner, proud to be first, ran joyously off to present it to his father. After a strangely long interval, his brother slowly entered, looking anything but happy, with three or four of

the poorest cherries in the bottom of his basket. Their father took it from him with a kind but sorrowful look, placed it on a table by the well-filled basket of his brother, and then led both boys in to share his birthday banquet with him. Yes, both boys. But don't you think it was a very different feast to those two brothers? How came it about? The second boy's tree was fuller of fruit than the other. A few cherries, he thought, he could enjoy himself, and yet make as good a show as his brother. He tasted one after another, intending each to be the last, and then tempted to take just one more; till behold! his tree was stripped, and only those few of the poorest left for his father.

Was it not mean and miserable?

And even if you could be sure of being saved at last, as so many hope to be, by a late repentance, after a worldly, careless, ungodly life; will it not be a mean, miserable thing, to have eaten up in selfish sinful enjoyment all the bright years of youth, all the rich ripe years of middle life, and to bring a few feeble worn-out years, the poor remains of life,—perhaps only a few weeks or days,—to give to your Father who gave you all, and to

your Saviour who died for you? Oh! How much happier to hear His call in the early morning of life, to do a full day's work for Him; and at eventide to hear Him say—"Well done! good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."





## WISHING FOR WINGS.



ING DAVID was one of the wisest of men; yet he is not ashamed to tell us that one day he could not help wishing for what he knew was impossible. He wished for wings. The reason was, that he was so grieved with the wickedness of a great many of the people among whom he lived, that he longed to get away to some quiet valley, among lonely mountains and forests, where he could be alone with God. So he said, "OH THAT I HAD WINGS like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest." (Psa. lv. 6.)

Other people besides King David have wished for wings. A little boy was sitting in school one bright summer morning. Looking up from his book, he could see through the open window the

finches and tomtits hopping among the trees, and the swallows skimming over the grass. And he could not help saying to himself, "Oh that I had wings! for then I would fly out of school, and do nothing but play with the birds in the sunshine." By the by, he did not know that the birds were not at play, but hard at work, catching flies and grubs to feed their young ones. Perhaps you knew that little boy. Or was it a little girl you knew who wished for wings? Well, let me give you a word of advice about this.

I. DON'T SPEND YOUR TIME IN WISHING FOR WINGS; or for anything else that is impossible. Not that there is anything wrong in a wish, unless what we wish for is wrong. Wishes will come flying into our minds, as little birds sometimes hop in at an open window. But do not pet and feed and fondle them. Let them fly away again. There was nothing wrong in King David's saying, "Oh that I had wings!" but it would have been very wrong and very foolish if he had wasted his time in longing for wings, and murmuring and grumbling because he could not have them. Wishing is profitless work, even for possible things.



No one ever got to the top of a mountain, or even to the top of a ladder, by wishing he were up there. No! you must climb, step by step.

II. GOD GAVE DAVID SOMETHING MUCH BETTER THAN WINGS. Read verses 16, 17, 22 of Psalm lv., and look at the last six words of v. 23, and you will see how this was. Often God denies our wishes, that He may give us something better than we ask or think. A pair of dove's wings would be useless, unless you had a dove's body; or eagle's, unless you had an eagle's body. "Oh, but that's just what I should like—to be a bird, just for a little time." Is it? Then, perhaps, you would wish for legs like a gazelle, or fins like a whale. One can't have everything. And yet I remember that St. Paul says to real Christians, "All things are yours, . . . and ye are Christ's." (1 Cor. iii. 21.) The Lord Jesus needed no wings to fly up to Heaven. And we need no wings to get near enough to Him to talk to Him. When you pray to Him, He listens, and hears every word, as though He stood close to you. Ask Him to help you to use your hands and feet in His service. Love to Him will be better than the winged shoes

you read of in the old Greek fables. It will make your feet swift and your hands nimble for every duty, and every kindness. It will give wings to your thoughts, so that they will fly up to Him, and then come back fresher and more earnest, to your work. Then, when the time comes, He will give you what is far better than wings: He will come and receive you to Himself, that where He is, you may be also.





## PLAY.



I WISH to talk to you  
a little about **PLAY**.

Things look very different according to the temper in which we look at them. It is as though we had two or three pairs of eyes apiece, and put on sometimes our bright pair, sometimes our dull ones, and sometimes our fault-finding eyes. Put on your cheerful eyes, some bright spring morning, and look out on the fields, and woods, and moors. Does not the world seem full of play? The lambs are frisking in the meadows; the gnats are romping in the sunshine; the young leaves

dance in the wind, that seems to frolic among them; the birds play hide and seek among the branches; the rabbits pop in and out of their burrows, and scamper up the green banks; the white clouds seem to be running races across the sky, and the shadows of them along the hill-sides; the clear brook that comes leaping and skipping down from its rock-cradle, bounding and tumbling over the big stones in a hundred little waterfalls, beating itself into milky foam or silvery spray, and then spinning itself clear again in shady hollows and deep eddies, seems full of life, and merriment, and joy.

And yet, when old King Solomon looked out on this bright, beautiful world, with a sad weary heart, because he had tried so many ways—alas! many wrong ways—of getting happiness, and had failed, and was growing weary of life, it looked to him, not as if all things were full of PLAY, but as if all things were full of hard toil and travail. “All things,” he said, “are full of labour.” You see he had his sorrowful eyes on. “The sun ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it

whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea ; yet the sea is not full ; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. ALL THINGS ARE FULL OF LABOUR ; man cannot utter it." \*

Now, the curious thing is, that both these different ways of looking at things are right. All things, as God has made them, are full of joy and brightness ; and yet all are full, too, of work. The lambs in the field think of nothing but playing and eating, and sleeping when they are tired ; and the older sheep, that are grown too sober and grave to play, think only of eating and resting. They never dream they are *at work*. And yet, you know, all the while they are *growing the wool* that is to make our clothing. No wool,—then no cloth mills or worsted mills ; no snug blankets, or soft warm winter garments ; no cloth merchants or wool merchants, or warehouses to hold their bales and sacks ; no ships to bring wool from Australia and from Germany ; no work for the men who build the warehouses and the ships, or for the sailors in the ships and for all the work-people in

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\* Ecclesiastes i. 3-8.

the factories! All these people the lambs and sheep are keeping at work, and enabling to maintain their families, while frisking so merrily and feeding so happily, without any more thought or care than the daisies and buttercups round their feet.

That is something worth thinking of, is it not?

Just so, the leaves, which seem idly dancing on the boughs, as if they had nothing to do but to look pretty, are busy, especially when the sun shines, drinking in light and air, helping to feed the young wood, which perhaps some day will make a strong beam in a house, or a stout timber in a ship. The grave, silent roots, at work down underground, drinking in the rain, would never be able to make an inch of wood, if they had not the merry dancing little leaves to help them. The clouds, too, as they float and skim hither and thither in the sky; and the wind, as it kisses your cheek, and perhaps snatches your hat off and twirls it in the air, as if in jest; and the brook, as it trips gaily along on its way to the great ocean, singing as it goes: all these are at work. The tiny rain-drops, that make rainbows as they fall, and glance off the leaves, and splash in the pools,

and patter on the windows, as if they had all broken loose from the clouds for a holiday, are among the busiest things in all creation. Nothing has so much work to do as the rain, unless it be the sunshine, which when it seems to be only holding the candle for everything else to work by, and smiling to see all things so busy, is really harder at work than any of them. It is keeping the winds and waters moving, and the plants growing, and living creatures breathing. If the rain ceased all over the world, all animals and plants would die in a few months. But if the sun should cease to shine, they would all die in a few days, and our whole globe would become a desert of ice.

Well, but all this is about Work. I promised to talk about Play. What has all this to do with Play? Well, I know, if you do not; and perhaps you will find out by and by. If you do not, it does not much matter. The lambs never find out that they are growing wool for us to wear; but the wool grows all the same. And just so, you may learn many things without knowing that you are learning, and be doing real work, like the lambs, when you think you are only at play.

Well, that is curious! But what sort of work?

Suppose, for example, you are running races, in a large field from which the sweet hay has just been carried. Now! To the furthest corner, touch the old oak and back! One! Two! Three! and away! Two of us stand at the starting point, holding a handkerchief for the foremost in the race to lay hold of, in token that he has won. Now one is first; now another overtakes and passes him; now all have touched the tree; back you all come, straining, panting, running your best; now one has snatched the handkerchief,—or perhaps two hands are laid on it at the same moment, and it is “a tie!” How your cheeks glow, and your eyes shine! You hold your sides and say, “Oh! I am so out of breath!” How is that? It was play, was it not? “Oh yes, it was great fun, but *it was hard work too.*” Yes, and very good kind of work too, for with every breath of the fresh sunny air, and every movement of your limbs, at your topmost speed, you were getting health and strength. And you were *doing your best*; and that is what we should all learn to do, working or playing; for the Bible says, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”

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“With thy might”—what does that mean? It means, putting your heart and soul into it, not doing things half-heartedly, as if you were all the while thinking of something else, but doing your very best. There is a right and a wrong way in everything; and if a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well.

“All that you do, do with your might;  
Things done by halves are never done right.”

But then, you know, “all our might” may mean very different things, according to what we have to do. In running a race, you must put your might into your legs; in playing cricket or football, into your whole body; in playing on the piano, or drawing, into your fingers and eyes; in guessing a riddle, or playing chess, not into your body at all, but into your *thoughts*. Some games require strength and agility, and some require skill and thought. The best games are those which need a good deal of both; and the worst games, those which require neither strength nor skill, neither energy nor thought. This is one reason why games of chance are bad: you cannot put *your might* into them; they amuse and excite, but they do you no good.

Do you know that there is a text in the Bible about BOYS AND GIRLS PLAYING? It is in ZECHARIAH, one of the three prophets who prophesied to the Jews after they came back from their Captivity, and who tried to teach them to fear and love God better than their fathers had done. He says, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts . . . the streets of the City shall be full of boys and girls, playing in the streets thereof" (viii. 4, 5). If you turn to the passage in your Bible, you will see that the prophet is telling the people God's gracious promises about the good and happy times which should come, if they would only fear and love God, who had delivered them from Babylon, and brought them home to the land of their fathers. And one thing to show that they were good and happy times was to be this; that there were to be plenty of boys and girls at play, merrily and healthily and happily.

Did you ever think that God takes notice of "boys and girls playing," and is pleased to see them at their play,—if it is play of the right sort? A great part of your lives while you are boys and girls is spent in play; and God meant it to be so, both for your happiness, and that you may grow

healthy and strong in body and in mind. Therefore, you see, if God did not think about you, and take care of you, when you are at play, there would be a large part of your lives in which God was not thinking of you and watching over you for good. But that cannot be. Every moment He is thinking of us; and though we cannot *think* about Him when our whole thought is wanted for what we are doing, yet we ought always to *feel* that He is near to us, and sees us, and loves us. Don't you know, when any one whom you love is gone away on a long journey, how dull the house feels, and how you *miss* them? You *felt* they were in the house, even when you did not see them or think about them. And when they come home again, how bright and cheerful the house feels to you! So we ought to feel about God. Out of doors or in doors, all bright and pleasant and happy things ought to remind us—God is here! And then, if trouble, sickness, or sorrow come to us, we shall be able to feel that God is “a very present help in trouble.”

In the old days in Greece, people used to pay great attention to such games as running races, wrestling, leaping, and throwing. At Sparta, girls as well as boys used to be trained in these exer-

cises. At certain places, great public games used to be held ; and though the prize was only a crown of wild olive, or some other plant,\* and a palm branch, yet to conquer in these games was counted one of the greatest honours any one could win. Sometimes, in the New Testament, the life of a real Christian in this world is compared to striving and conquering in those ancient games. This is what St. Paul means when he says, "Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? SO RUN THAT YE MAY OBTAIN. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."

Well ; those were games for grown-up men. But can it be of any consequence in God's sight what games children play at, and how they play ?

Think a little. I am not going to answer any question which you can answer yourself, merely to save you the trouble of thinking. Suppose, for instance, you are playing cricket, and the other side has such a tremendous innings that it seems as if your side would never have a chance ; or the

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\* A crown or wreath of *Wild Olive* at the OLYMPIC Games ; of *Pine* or of *Ivy* at the ISTHMIAN ; of *Green Parsley* at the NEMEAN, and of *Laurel* at the PYTHIAN.

ball stings your hand as you catch it ; or your bat unaccountably misses the ball, by about a hair's-breadth, and your wicket goes down at the first ball ; or there is a dispute, and the umpire decides against you ; or after a hard contest, the other side wins by *one*. In all this, is there not a good deal of room for patience, and pluck, and good temper, and fairness, and self-control, and generosity ? Room, too, for impatience, and cowardice, and unfairness, and ill-temper, and spite. These are not little things. They are among the most important things in life. It matters nothing in God's sight which side wins the game ; but it matters a great deal which boys are the most brave, and patient, and just, and generous. So I don't think it would be right for you to pray beforehand that *your side may win the game* ; because, you see, that means praying that the others may lose ; and it is much better to be defeated and bear it well, than to win and be conceited, and crow over your opponents. But you may certainly pray to be able to do your best, so that you need not be ashamed if you lose ; and above all to be unselfish, and able to think as much of others' enjoyment as of your own.

Suppose, again, you are playing some indoors game, boys and girls together, and that some one is so much cleverer than you are, that you are always beaten: how hard it is not to be envious, and perhaps to lose your temper,—which is a hundred times worse than losing the game! Or, suppose you have nearly won, and you see that just a *little bit of cheating*—so little it hardly seems cheating—will win you the game; what a temptation there is to forget our Saviour's warning, that “he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much!” In almost any sort of play, you are bound to *play fair*, and may be tempted to unfair or ill-natured, ungenerous play. And what is “fair play,” but keeping the Master's golden rule?—“ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO TO YOU, DO YE EVEN SO TO THEM.”

What a boy is in his play—generous or mean, brave or cowardly, kind or selfish, active or lazy, fair or unfair, true or false—that he is very likely to be when he grows up, in business and other weighty concerns of life. And I suppose the same holds good of girls. There is a story told of the

great King CYRUS, that when he was born, his cruel grandfather, King ASTYAGES, ordered him to be put to death, because the Magians prophesied that this infant would grow up to be a great conqueror, and would take away the kingdom from Astyages. The little Baby was given to a shepherd, that he might put it out in the field till it was dead. But the shepherd's wife, whose own baby had just died, had pity on the beautiful babe, and brought it up as her own child. When Cyrus was ten years old, the other boys of the village, when they were all playing together, chose Cyrus for their king. He commanded some to do one thing and some another; and one boy, who did not obey, he had seized and flogged. The boy's father, who was a nobleman, was furiously angry, and had Cyrus brought before the King; and the brave straightforward answers and noble bearing of Cyrus caused his grandfather to find out who he was. I cannot tell you if the story is true; but this is certain, that if Cyrus had been cowardly, or lazy, or careless, or frivolous, when he was a boy, he would never have been a great king and mighty conqueror when a man.

Perhaps some of you will tell me that you

have read of some very clever men, who when they were boys were not at all good hands at any game, and perhaps took no interest in play; and yet they grew up to be famous. That is true; and it shows that a boy or girl is not to be despised for being dull and awkward in some things, if they make up for it by being clever and active in other things. But as a rule, if a boy is healthy in mind and body, he will love play; and God means him to love it, and to play heartily, "with his might." And what I want you to see is, that it is possible to please God in your play, just as much as in learning lessons, or working, or praying, or preaching sermons. "WHATSOEVER YE DO, DO IT HEARTILY, AS TO THE LORD."\*

Do you keep your eyes open when you are at play? What a droll question! Who could play at anything except blind-man's-buff with his eyes shut? Ah, but I don't mean the eyes of your body, but the eyes of your mind. Many people walk about with their bodily eyes wide open, and yet see very little, because *their mind's eyes are shut*: they do not take notice of what they see, and think about it. Now if you keep those INSIDE

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\* Col. iii. 23. Compare 1 Cor. x. 31.



EYES of yours open, you may learn a great many lessons at play.

For instance, a score of boys are starting in a race. They all start fair. If one is younger and weaker than the rest, he is put a few yards forward, to give him a fair chance. Before they have gone many yards, one boy is well ahead of all the rest. Is that the one who will win? Very likely not. If it were a very short race, he would win easily, for he runs like a deer. But when the race is half over, the others gain upon him. Now he is no longer foremost. And look, one boy, who was almost last at the beginning of the race, is steadily pulling up to the front, and within a few yards of the goal he makes a spurt, puts out all his strength, and is first at the goal. So it is, very often, in a great many other things, besides running races; in study, in business, in politics; even in religion. So our Lord Jesus tells us,—“MANY THAT ARE FIRST SHALL BE LAST, AND THE LAST FIRST.”

Now why is this so?

Somebody must be first, you know, and some last. It pleases God to give more to some than to others. No two boys or girls, no two men or women, are exactly equal in strength and cleverness, any more than they are alike in face. In the

parable of the Talents, you know, one servant was trusted with five talents, another with two, another with only one. And so we sometimes say that one person has a "talent," or a "gift" for arithmetic, another for languages, another for music, and so on; meaning that God has made them cleverer in that particular thing than other people. And God gives more to some than to others, not for their own sake, but that the strong may defend the weak, and the rich help the poor, and the wise teach and counsel the ignorant; so that we should be like the Israelites when they gathered the manna, and "He that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack." \*

"Why are springs enthroned so high,  
Where the mountains kiss the sky?  
'Tis that thence their streams may flow,  
Fertilising all below.

"Why have clouds such lofty flight,  
Basking in the golden light?  
'Tis to send down genial showers  
On this lower world of ours.

"Why does God exalt the great?  
'Tis that they may prop the State.  
Riches, why doth He confer?  
That the rich may minister." †

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\* 2 Cor. viii. 15.

† JOSIAH CONDER ("The Choir and the Oratory," p. 259).

Well, some must be first, and some last: that is plain. But why should the first be last, and the last first? Very often it is because those to whom God gives most do not make the best use of it. Suppose the man who received five talents had wasted them all in sport and feasting, and the man who had only one had traded wisely and diligently with that one, then the last would have been praised as a good and faithful servant, and the first condemned as slothful and wicked. Perhaps the boy who was ahead of all the rest at the beginning of the race was a *spendthrift* of strength and breath. He started at the top of his speed, and ran himself out of breath. Or perhaps he was so proud and vain of his swiftness, that he neglected *training*. The boy who won may not have been by nature so swift a runner as any of the rest; but he may have trained very patiently and diligently, and learned to husband his power, and manage his breath; and so the last was first.

Two boys are living in the same village; one rich and one poor; one the Squire's son, the other the son of the village blacksmith. PRIMUS, the young squire, has a private tutor, is sent to a public school, and thence to Oxford or Cambridge; and

has plenty of money to buy as many books as he wants. SECUNDUS, the young blacksmith, goes to the village school, and leaves it early to work at the anvil. He has very few books, and is obliged to read them at odd times, or early in the morning and late at night, and to get any one he can find to explain to him a bit there and a bit here. And yet, strange to say! it may happen that in twenty years, Secundus will be at the head of some large business, and in ten years more a member of Parliament, and Squire Primus will hardly be known beyond his village. And why? It *may* be because the poor boy had brains, and the rich boy lacked brains; but most likely the real secret is, that one was diligent and the other negligent. The young blacksmith WORKED, because he knew that he would never get on but by hard work. The young squire did not work, because he had all he wanted, and did not care about getting on. So the last was first.

“The heights by great men reach’d and kept,  
Were not attain’d by sudden flight;  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Went toiling upward in the night.”

Sometimes PRIDE is the reason why “the first are last.” Sooner or later, in play or in earnest,

Pride must have a fall. You remember how, in the fable, the Hare despised the slow, creeping Tortoise, knowing how easily he could beat him, and thought he would indulge in a nap. And so the Tortoise won. The Kite that fancied it could fly above the clouds, if only the string did not keep it down, tugging till it broke the string, tumbled headlong to the ground. Perhaps, when you were little, you used to build card houses. One storey, —two, three, four storeys high: a famous card house! But you thought you would build one storey higher, and down it all came at once! So I have known men who were rich and prosperous, and might have continued so, if they could have been content. But they went on building up their business bigger and bigger, till it all came down with a crash, like your card house, and so the first were last.

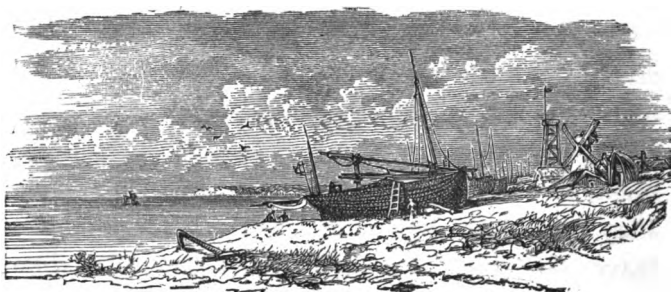
Now my talk about Play must finish. I will not try to tell you what games or amusements are innocent and right, and what are wrong and bad. But here are two good rules: Your play should NEVER PAIN OR INJURE OTHERS; and it should make you FITTER FOR WORK,—stronger and healthier in mind and body. To do anything

cruel or unjust *for fun*, is what the Bible calls fools' sport.\* To injure your health, or spoil your power for work, and pleasure in work, by amusement, is to make a whip for your own shoulders. Play as brightly and merrily as the lambs, and the leaves, and the fountains; but let your play, like theirs, do good to yourselves and others, and harm to nobody.

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\* Prov. x. 23; xiv. 9; xv. 21.





## THE RIVER OF GOD.



IF it were promised that you should see the *River of God*, would you not expect some great and wonderful sight? And if, then, some one led you to the window, and you saw the rain pouring down, would not you be much disappointed? "Why," you would say, "I see no river at all! I only see a great many drops of rain." Yes; but that is what the Bible (Psalm lxxv. 9) calls "THE RIVER OF GOD, WHICH IS FULL OF WATER."

Let us have a little talk about this wonderful river. And, first—

I. WHERE IS ITS FOUNTAIN? Every river, you know, has a spring or fountain—some pool or

rocky cavern where it first springs up out of the deep dark earth. But where is the fountain from which the rain is fed? How is it that, however much rain comes pouring down from the sky, till it seems as if the clouds must rain themselves quite away, more clouds, full of rain, are always ready? The fountain of the rain is the great ocean. When the sun shines on the sea, especially in the Torrid Zone, it warms the water, and the water flies up into the air in invisible vapour or steam. So the air is always full of water, even when we cannot see a cloud in the sky. Then, when this steam gets high up in the air, where it is colder, it turns into little tiny drops, smaller than you can fancy, and these make the clouds. By and by these tiny little drops turn into larger drops, and fall down to the earth in rain. And thus it is that "the river of God is full of water."

II. WHERE DOES THIS RIVER FLOW? Other rivers flow along in channels of rock or earth; but the river of the rain flows through the air, confined by no banks. It flows above the mountains, north, south, east, or west, wherever the wind may carry it. And so it is ready to send down its

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refreshing streams on hill, or valley, or plain, just whenever and wherever it is wanted. It falls on the mountains and moors, and comes streaming down their sides in little waterfalls, gathering into rushing torrents. It sinks down deep into the earth, and helps to fill the wells and springs. It falls on the pastures and meadows, and makes the grass grow for the sheep and cattle; and on the woods, and makes the buds burst out into leaf; and on the fields, and feeds the corn and the turnips, which are to give food for man and beast; and on the gardens, and the flowers seem to rejoice in it, and to praise God. Many a shower seems wasted; it falls on sandy deserts where nothing grows, or back into the sea from whence it came. Never mind, little raindrops, your turn will come! You have plenty of time! After you have rested awhile in the sandy waste, or floated about awhile in the salt sea, the sunshine will call you up again into the sky, to help to fill "the river of God."

The snow, too, and the hail, are part of "the river of God." For when the clouds rise very high in the air, it is so cold that they are frozen, and turn to snow; or sometimes the rain is frozen as it falls, and then it is hail. And so the tops of all

the highest mountains are covered with snow, in summer as well as winter.

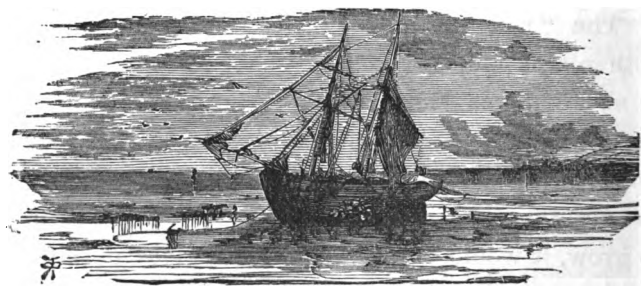
III. WHAT DOES THIS RIVER DO? It feeds all the other rivers. The great fields of snow and ice on the lofty mountains are always melting and sending torrents roaring and leaping down their rocky channels, which turn into peaceful streams when they reach the green valleys, and help to fill the great rivers. The rain which soaks deep down into the earth goes to fill the wells and fountains. There is not a drop of water you drink but once came down from the sky, perhaps years or hundreds of years ago, in rain, or hail, or snow. "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full: unto the place from whence the rivers came, thither they return again." (Eccles. i. 7.)

The "river of God" feeds all living things, both plants and animals. What? *Do we eat the rain?* Think a little. You eat bread and butter, and milk, and meat. But where does the bread come from? From the corn. And if there were no rain, the corn would never grow, or if it began to grow, it would wither. The cow gives us milk and butter, and we eat the flesh of oxen and sheep,

and other creatures. But what do they eat? The grass, and turnips, and other things that grow out of the ground. And if the rain ceased, the grass and all plants and fruits of every sort would perish, and the whole face of the earth would become a bare dusty desert.

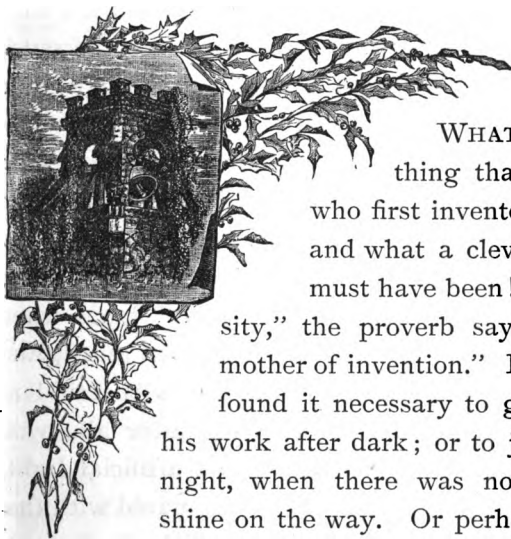
Perhaps you may remind me that in the land of Egypt, where there is no rain, the river Nile overflows the land, and makes the harvest grow. True; but it is the rain which falls on the mountains far away in the south, which fills the river and makes it overflow.

So, you see, all our food, as well as every draught we drink, comes to us from this wonderful river of the rain.





## THE LAMP THAT NEVER GOES OUT.



WHAT a good thing that man did who first invented a lamp! and what a clever man he must have been! "Necessity," the proverb says, "is the mother of invention." Perhaps he found it necessary to go on with his work after dark; or to journey by night, when there was no moon to shine on the way. Or perhaps it was not a man who invented it, but some mother, who did not like to hear her little children crying in the dark; and so she thought and

thought (for mothers take wonderful trouble for their children) until she thought of a way for having light in the house by night as well as by day. Then when people had once got the idea, they went on making all sorts of lamps and improving them. And so the workman was not obliged to put away his tools because the sun had set; and the scholar could read his book by night as well as by day; and the house was filled with cheerful light, and sent some rays into the outer darkness to welcome the father when he came home at night; and the benighted traveller was able to see his way; and the miner learned, with the help of the friendly faithful lamp, to go down underground, where daylight never comes; and bring gold, and gems, and iron, and copper to light.

A beautiful thing, too, is a good lamp when the oil is pure, and the wick well trimmed, and the flame burns clear and bright: as beautiful as it is ingenious and useful. Yet, after all, what poor things are our most splendid artificial lights—even the electric light itself—compared with that wonderful and glorious lamp which God's own hand has hung up in the sky, which lights half the world at once, and sends its beams to other worlds,

—the Sun! When the lamp of day is kindled in the east, our lamps and candles seem to say,—“We are not wanted now; we can go out.” The twinkling stars fade in the sky. The flowers open on every hill-side and in every meadow. Life wakes up from slumber; and the fresh morning seems so full of joy that we could fancy the sun himself rejoicing as he pours out such a flood of light and warmth on all living things. And so the Psalmist says the morning sun is “as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.”

Now, can you tell what is that LIGHT which shines brighter than the sun—shining not only into the eyes, but into the understanding and heart and conscience; which never sets like the sun, or burns dim or goes out and wants trimming and re-lighting like a lamp of man’s making; which gives us more light the more we use it; shines brightest when trouble makes life seem dark and gloomy, and can light us even through the dark valley of the shadow of death, to the very gate of heaven?

It is the light of truth in God’s holy word; of which King Solomon says, “THE COMMANDMENT

IS A LAMP, AND THE LAW IS LIGHT;" and of which the Psalmist says, "Thy word is a LAMP unto my feet and a LIGHT unto my path." (Prov. vi. 28; Ps. cxix. 105.) Thus God's word is like sunlight, because it is so glorious, and comforting, and wide reaching, and searching, and needful to show us the way we have to walk in and the work we have to do; and also like a lamp or lantern, because we can hold it in our hand, make it our own, and use it in the smallest as well as the greatest concerns of life, just as though God meant it for us only.

Let us talk a little about this Divine Lamp; and first of all note that it is

#### A LIGHT ON THE PATH.

LIFE, you know, is often compared to a journey or pilgrimage. Joy and happiness are like sunshine lighting up the landscape. Troubles and trials are like clouds and storms. Difficulties are like rough and steep parts of the road, which try our breath and test our strength: "uphill work" we often say. Temptations are like miry, slippery places, where if we do not walk heedfully we shall get a fall. Duty is the right road, and sin and folly are wandering from the road,—climbing over

the hedge, or turning into a side path that will lead us astray. Childhood and youth are the pleasant morning hours when we begin our journey, with the dew on the wayside flowers, and the lark singing in the clear sky overhead. Middle life is the hot, dusty noon, when the traveller is glad now and then to rest awhile under some shady tree by a clear-springing fountain. Old age is the eventide, when we descend the hill; Heaven is the home to which, if we are in the right way, every step brings us nearer. And what is death? Death is the sunset, when the journey must end; but to the true Christian it is not a winter sunset, followed by a long, dark night, but only such a sunset as they have in the far north at midsummer, when the golden sun just dips down behind the horizon, and in a few moments rises again.

Now there are two methods of taking a journey. One is, to choose the right road, be it rugged mountain footpath or smooth highway, and to keep in it till we reach our journey's end. The other is, to climb fences, force a way through gaps in hedges, trespass across fields, leap ditches, scramble up and down pathless steep, and thus choose our own way. There is great fun, I think I hear you



say, in this random sort of travelling. I don't deny it, if you are out for a holiday stroll, and have plenty of time, to ramble where you please. But life is not a holiday ramble, but a serious journey, for our Saviour teaches that it must end either in Heaven or in Hell; either in His presence, "where there is fulness of joy," or in "outer darkness," where there shall be "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." And there is no time to spare; because the youngest may only have a few steps left of his journey; and because the oldest Christian will tell you how sorry he is to have wasted even one day in which he might have glorified his dear Lord and Master, and done good to others.

So you see the only safe and happy thing is to begin life's journey in the right way, and to keep in it, fearing to take even one step out of it. When Christian and Hopeful got over the stile into By-path Meadow, they meant only to go a *very little* out of their way, because the soft green grass looked so much pleasanter than the hard dusty road. They thought, as people often do think, that there was *not much* harm in it; it would not make *much* difference. But it led them

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to Doubting Castle; and hard work they had to escape from the clutches of grim Giant Despair, and to get back into the King's highway. If you do not remember the story, get the "Pilgrim's Progress" and read it.

The best path in the world would be of no use without light enough to see our way. If we cannot have daylight, we shall be glad of moonlight; and if the night be dark and moonless, we shall want lamplight. Moonlight, you know, is reflected sunlight; sunshine which the moon catches and throws back to us when the sun has set. But what a glorious lamp you would have, if it were possible to get a spark of the sun itself, and put that into your lantern! Even such a lamp is the Bible. Not like the lamps men make; but pure daylight and sunshine of God's own making, yet which we can carry in our own hand, sure that it will never fail us. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov. iv. 10.)

Without this light our life can hardly be compared to a journey. It is rather like a confused wandering in a wilderness, with no road through it. The Bible says of sinners that they "walk in

darkness." And our Saviour tells us that "he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth."

When the gospel was first preached to the Saxons of Northumbria, by Paulinus (as we read in Bede's History), and King Edwin sat in Council with his chiefs and wise men, to consult whether they should give up their idols and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Councillors arose and spoke thus: "In winter, O King, when thou art sitting in thy hall at supper, with a great fire burning, and thy nobles and commanders around thee, sometimes a little bird flies through the hall, in at one window and out at another. The moment of his passage is sweet to him, for he feels neither cold nor tempest; but it is short, and from the dark winter he vanishes into the dark winter again. Such, O King, seems to me the short life of man; for we know not whence we came or whither we go. If, therefore, this new doctrine can teach us anything certain, let us embrace it." And so Edwin and his people came out of the dark winter of heathenism into the glorious light of the gospel, and became Christians, and destroyed their idols; just as in our own day has been done in Madagas-

car, and in many of the South Sea Islands. So our Saviour's own preaching is described:—"The people who sat in darkness saw great light; and to them who sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up." (Matt. iv. 16.)

This Heavenly Lamp is

#### A LIGHT UPON THE PAST.

THE Bible shows us how Man began his journey, created "in the image of God," and happy in loving and obeying God. It shows us *his first wrong step*, and how one wrong act opened the door to sin, and misery, and death. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Some people think it very hard that Adam should be condemned for ONE SIN, or at any rate for so trifling an act as gathering and eating fruit. They forget that there can be no such thing as a *trifling sin*. The action may be trifling, but sin is no trifle. It is disobedience to God. To pull a trigger and fire off a pistol is as easy and slight an action as to pick and eat a fruit; but if the pistol is loaded, and pointed at any one, it is murder. One sin (as St. James teaches us) breaks God's law as truly as many sins: just as the breaking one link of a chain severs the chain as completely as if many

links were broken. Besides, one sin cannot stand alone: it leads to others. Sin is like leaven; or like dry-rot in a building; or like fever-poison: it spreads. It is like seed. One tiny thistle-down, sown and springing up, would in a few years be the parent of so many thistles, each having thousands of seeds, that if unchecked they would by and by cover the whole earth. So ONE SIN—a small action, but a great sin—was the beginning of all the sin in the world, and of all the sorrow and pain that spring from sin. “For the wages of sin is death.”

Thus the word of God, teaching us how sin, from a small beginning, grows, and spreads, and ends in death, is

#### A WARNING LIGHT.

ON the Eddystone Rock (as I daresay you know) stands a lofty tower called a light-house. The top of the tower is a huge lantern, the light in which is kindled every evening at dusk, and shines all night through, sending its beams for miles and miles over the sea. When fierce tempests rage, the waves sometimes run up the tower and break in spray over its top; but they cannot put out the light. The tower was built there for the sake of the light. But of what use is the light?

It is *a light of warning*. Before the light-house was built, many a gallant ship struck on that rock, and thousands of brave mariners perished. Now the faithful light says to the sailors, as the ships come sailing on through the darkness: "Beware! Come not here. Turn into the harbour, or keep out to sea, and you will be safe. But keep clear of this rock, or you will perish." And if the crew of any vessel despised the warning, and tried *how close to the rock* they could sail, and the ship struck on the rock and went down with all on board,—whose fault would it be? Their own. No one's else. If they had obeyed the warning light they would have been saved.

In many parts of England the loftiest hill-tops are called "Beacons." In ancient times, when wars were frequent, stores of faggots were kept ready to kindle a great blaze on those hill-tops, in order to give the alarm if an enemy were approaching. These alarm-fires, giving warning of danger, were called "beacons," that is, signals. So, when the great Spanish fleet, called the Armada—blessed by the Pope, having on board instruments of torture to torture English Protestants, and an army to conquer and enslave our country—

drew near the English Channel, beacon-fires were kindled on every headland and hill-top.

“Far on the deep the Spaniard saw, along each southern shire,  
Cape beyond cape, in endless range, those twinkling points of fire.  
And on, and on, without a pause, untired they bounded still ;  
All night from tower to tower they sprang, they sprang from hill to hill.”

All England took the alarm, and by morning light every man was at his post ready to defend his country.

The Bible is God's light-house, to warn us of the treacherous rocks of sin, on which we are in danger of being wrecked. It is God's beacon-light, warning us to be on our guard against the assaults of temptation, and the power and craft of that great enemy of our souls, from whom we can be safe only when we “put on the whole armour of God.”

The Bible shows us what sin is : that it consists not merely in particular actions and words, but in disobeying God, forgetting God, failing to love God with all our heart. In the Bible, God PLEADS with sinners :—“*Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!*” He REASONS with sinners :—“*Turn ye,*

*turn ye . . . why will ye die?"* He even BESEECHES sinners:—"Be ye reconciled to God!" And he WARNS sinners:—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The end of those things is death." (Jer. xliv. 4. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. 2 Cor. v. 20. Ezek. xviii. 4. Rom. vii. 21.)

This glorious lamp, of which we are talking, is something still better and more hopeful than a warning light. It is

#### A SAVING LIGHT.

IN the land of Israel, in old times, there were six Cities of Refuge. Any one who had by mischance slain some one might flee to one of these cities and be safe from the avenger. The roads to the cities were made very plain, with bridges across every stream, and at every turn a way-post with the words "REFUGE! REFUGE!" But the fugitive would have to flee by day; or if the dark night overtook him on the way, he must have a lamp. The road would be of no use to him if he could not see it. So the gospel shows us 'the way of salvation,' by which we must 'flee for refuge.' It is

"A light to shine upon the road  
That leads me to the Lamb."

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Near the city of Rome are deep underground caverns and passages, where in ancient times the persecuted Christians met secretly for worship; and where they buried their dead in vaults hewn in the rock. They are called the Catacombs. The passages are so numerous, that it is said their length altogether may be a hundred miles. If you ventured in without a guide and a light, you would soon be lost; and you might wander on and on till you sank and died with hunger and weariness. You would never find your way out. A whole party of travellers was once so lost. But suppose a lost wanderer in that dark dreary labyrinth were to think—“*God knows the way out,*” and were to pray earnestly that God would show him the way. And suppose, while he was praying, a guide drew near, with a lamp, who had come in quest of him. How joyfully he would follow that guide! How beautiful the light of that lamp would seem to him! Suppose they passed a chamber filled with thousands of gold and silver, and the guide said—“Shall we stop here and be rich?” He would reply—“Stop here! not for a moment! What good is silver and gold to me? I want to get out into the daylight, and to find my way home!”

And when he saw the daylight, at first like a dim star at the end of a long passage, but clearer and brighter at every step, how eagerly he would hasten towards it! With what joy he would breathe the fresh air, and climb out of the pit's mouth into the warm bright sunshine, and see the sky overhead, and behold the path leading to his home!

A life of sin is like that dark labyrinth among the dead, leading to death. The further any one goes in it, the less likely he is ever to find his way out. Pray that God will keep you from ever entering into it. Pray that you may walk all day in the light of His countenance, in the path of His commandments, and in the way of His statutes, from the beginning of life to its end. Then will St. Paul's words be true of you:—"Ye are all the children of light, and the children of day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thes. v. 5, 6.)

"Courage! we travel through a darksome cave;  
 But still, as nearer to the light we draw,  
 Fresh gales will reach us from the upper air,  
 And wholesome dews of Heaven our foreheads lave;  
 The darkness lighten more; till, full of awe,  
 We stand in the open sunshine unaware."

Let us never forget to pray for all who are wandering in the dark ways of sin, that the light of God's truth may reach them, and their eyes be opened to see it, like those Ephesian Christians to whom St. Paul wrote: "Ye were formerly darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." (Eph. v. 8.)

Remember, too, that as the wanderer in the Catacombs would need not only a lamp but a guide, so the Holy Spirit is the Guide, without whose teaching even the Bible would be but a dark lantern. For what says St. Paul? "GOD, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. iv. 6.)

I have not time to tell all that might be told about this glorious Lamp. I should tire you if I tried. But there is one thing more I want you to remember. It is

#### A LIGHT FOR EVERY STEP.

IF you were travelling among the Alps, you would often have to journey along a narrow road, with lofty cliffs towering up on one side of you, and awful precipices on the other. The mountains

are too steep and high for you to see their top; the precipices too overhanging for you to see down to the bottom: even to look over makes you feel giddy. One step over the edge would be death. But this matters not as long as you can see the right path and keep in it. Clouds may clothe the mountains; mists may hide the valleys: it matters not if you have sunlight on your path. Just so, there are questions we should like to have answered, about which the Bible is silent; mysteries too high and too deep for us, on which it sheds no light. It shines on the way of duty and on the way of salvation, and upon *every step* of the way.

What a little thing a step is! Yet one wrong step—upon thin ice, for example, or into a hidden pit, or upon a plank that will not bear his weight—may cost a man his life. Even a step on a loose stone, or on a bit of orange-peel which some thoughtless person has dropped on the pavement, may lay you up for weeks with a sprained ankle or a broken limb. Just so it is in life. One *false step*,—that is, one mistaken or sinful choice, one wrong thing done, or right thing left undone, may cause days, or weeks, or years of trouble, or even be the ruin of a whole life. Do you understand what I mean? Here is an example.

When the people of Israel came to young King Rehoboam, to ask him to lighten their taxes and burdens, he asked counsel first of the old men, then of the young men; and had to choose which advice he would follow. That was what we call "an important step in life." Had he chosen right, according to the counsel of the wise old friends of his father, he would have *taken the right step*,—the first step of what might have been a happy and useful reign. But he took the wrong step; he followed the foolish advice of his proud, ignorant young comrades; and it was the ruin of him and of his kingdom.

The longest journey is but one step at a time. If you are in the right way, every step brings you a little nearer to the place you want to reach. But if the first step had been in the wrong road, every step would have been a step further away. The French proverb says, "It is only the first step that costs." If a lad who has been used to lie late in bed resolves to begin early rising, how terribly hard it is the first morning! The next morning it is not quite so bad; the next it is easier; and after a few weeks he wonders why he did not always rise early.

Step by step, the highest hills may be climbed, the hardest tasks accomplished, the most troublesome difficulties overcome.

“The giant pyramids of stone  
That, wedge-like, cleave the desert airs,  
When nearer seen, and better known,  
Are but gigantic flights of stairs.”

Some people think the way to use the Bible is to read a chapter every morning and evening, and think no more about it. That is as wise as lighting a lamp and looking at it, and then shutting it up in a cupboard. Perhaps if they have some great trouble to bear, or duty to do, those Christians will bring out the Lamp: they will turn to their Bibles for guidance or comfort. But our lives are made up of little things, as the long journey is made up of short steps. Look at them in the light of the lamp.

Perhaps you are tempted to do some *little thing* which you know is not right; but ‘there is not much harm in it.’ ‘Everybody does it.’ Stop! TURN THE LAMP UPON IT. “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”

Or you can do some small kindness, which would not cost you much; but you happen to be in a hurry, or feeling tired or vexed, and you think 'it doesn't much matter.' **TURN THE LAMP UPON IT.** Even "a cup of cold water" given for the Lord's sake to one of His "little ones," He has promised to reward.

Or your pride is roused, your temper tried, by something which in itself is trifling, but it hurts your dignity, or invades your rights. If it were persecution, you know, for Christ's sake, of course you would bear it. But as it is, you don't mean to stand it. **TURN THE LAMP UPON IT.** "See that none render evil for evil." "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." "A meek and lowly spirit . . . is in the sight of God of great price."

Or you are tempted to conceal your religion, and to please others by joining in what you think is of no very great importance, but which you know will not please or honour your Saviour; and which perhaps your companions would not expect you to do if they thought you were a real earnest Christian. **TURN THE LAMP UPON IT.** "Whoso-

ever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's and of the holy angels."

The time may come, if you live to be old, or worn and weary with long sickness, when your feeble hand will no more be able to hold this precious lamp. You will be glad to have some one at your side to hold it for you. But THE LAMP will not fail or burn dim. It shines brightest when all else is dark. It can shine down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and make the way through the valley bright and peaceful. If you have sought its light on all your steps, it will shine on the last step of your journey. Then you will need it no longer, for it will have guided you to the gates of that blessed home of which it is written,

"THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE;  
AND THEY NEED NO CANDLE,  
NEITHER LIGHT OF THE SUN,  
FOR THE LORD GOD GIVETH THEM LIGHT."







## LIVING STONES.



BENEATH one of the hills on which Jerusalem stands, is a vast cavern hewn in the rock. This cavern was the quarry from which were cut out the huge foundation-stones for the temple. In it are found great blocks partly cut out, with the marks of the mason's chisel as fresh on them as if King Solomon's or King Herod's stonemasons had been at work on them only yesterday. What does this mean? It means that those stones were intended to be used in building God's temple; but it was found they were not wanted: there were enough without them. There was no room for them; and so there they lie in the dark cave to this day.

Now, only fancy that one of those stones had

been *alive*, and could have thought, and spoken, and chosen for itself whether it would be built into God's temple or not. Suppose that stone had said to the masons, "It is of no use to go on cutting and chipping; I don't wish to be in the temple. Here I am, and here you may leave me. I shall be wanted some day for a palace, or a castle, or a bridge, and then they will come and take me out into the sunshine. I am in no hurry." Would you not have said, "O foolish, ungrateful, wicked stone! You are rightly punished by being left there in the dark for ever"—?

Well, but take care you are not like those stones. The apostle Peter speaks about "*living stones*." He says:—

"TO WHOM COMING [that is, to the LORD JESUS] AS UNTO A LIVING STONE . . . CHOSEN OF GOD AND PRECIOUS, YE ALSO, AS LIVELY STONES, ARE BUILT UP A SPIRITUAL TEMPLE."—1 Peter ii. 4, 5.

In this text, "*a spiritual house*" means a temple for God; not a church or chapel built of stone and wood, but a church made up of people—true Christians—in whose hearts God has promised to dwell. And by "*lively*" is meant, not cheerful and frolicsome, but *living*. (And so in the *revised version* we

read "living.") The Lord Jesus Christ is compared to "a living stone"—the chief foundation-stone (verses 6, 7); and all true Christians are compared to *living stones* built on Him, to make part of God's living temple. If you wish to know more about this living temple, read Isa. lxvi. 1, 2; John xiv. 23; 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17; Eph. ii. 19-22.

You remember that our Saviour gave to Simon his name "Peter," or "Cephas," which means "a stone," and said to him, "On this rock will I build My church." No doubt Peter thought a great deal about his name, and the meaning of it, and about rocks and stones. And so it is no wonder that he compared the Lord Jesus to a "living stone," and Christians to "living stones" built on Him to make part of God's temple."

Now, in what way are you to be one of these "living stones"? St. Peter says, "UNTO WHOM COMING." That is it. All depends on *coming* to the Lord Jesus; asking Him to be your Saviour, and yielding and trusting yourself to Him. The stones in the quarry, when the masons had finished hewing and shaping them, had to be hauled with ropes and moved on rollers, and hoisted with pulleys, and so laid in their appointed place in

the temple, because they were not "*living stones*." But the "*living stones*" must *come*. You cannot be *dragged* to Christ, or *carried* to Him, whether you will or no. You must *COME*.

Teachers, and parents, and ministers, are like God's masons, seeking to prepare you for a place in God's temple. Every lesson taught you, every hymn and text you learn, every service in which you join, leaves its *chisel-mark*—a mark on your heart. There they are, those marks; some so deep that you can hardly forget them; some so tiny that only God's eye can see them. But all will be vain and thrown away unless you *come*. You must come of your own free will; and yet it must be by God's grace, and help, and teaching. How can this be? Because when God gives us His Holy Spirit, He works in us "*both to will and to do*." This is what we pray for in one of our hymns—

"Make us willing to be Thine."

Remember, if YOU should be left out of God's great living temple, it will not be because *you were not wanted*, or because *there was no room* for you, like those stones in the cave at Jerusalem. There is plenty of room. God wants you. The Holy Spirit says "*To-day*." The Lord Jesus says "*Come*."

How sad, how terrible it would be, if in the great day, when the Lord will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness" (1 Cor. iv. 5), you should be found with all those marks in your heart and memory and conscience, showing what pains were taken to prepare you to be a living stone in God's temple, and yet be left out! And why?

If you give your heart to the Lord Jesus early, He may make you more than a stone—a **PILLAR**. He says (Rev. iii. 12), "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."





## FIGS OR THISTLES?



N my table, as I sit down to write, is a small nosegay of beautiful greenhouse flowers. I did not see them gathered, yet I know on what sort of plants they grew. How do I know? Because *the same kind of flowers always grow on the same kind of plants*. In my window are some pots filled with earth, in which I am going to plant some dry, dead-looking bulbs. Out of those ugly bulbs (if I take proper care of them) will grow up in a few weeks long glossy green leaves, and beautiful sweet-smelling hyacinths, blue, or red, or white, as I choose. How can I tell this, and how can I choose what coloured flowers I will have, before I see them? Because *out of the same kind of roots, always the same leaves and flowers will grow*. And as with flowers and leaves, so with fruit. Perhaps you recollect a curious question which our Lord

JESUS once asked His disciples. Wise teachers are fond of asking their scholars questions ; and because He was a wise teacher—the wisest teacher that ever taught—He often questioned His disciples. The question was this :—

“DO MEN GATHER GRAPES OF THORNS, OR FIGS OF THISTLES ?” (Matt. vii. 16.)

“Certainly not !” you will answer. Nobody dreams of such a thing ; or at least, if any one dreamed that he did, he would laugh when he woke at such a foolish dream. Every child knows that if I plant in my garden a currant bush or a cherry tree, cherries will not grow on the currant bush, nor currants on the cherry tree. The tree may bear no fruit ; for the frost may nip the blossom ; or the soil may be bad, and cause the tree to be barren ; or the tree may die. But if it bears any fruit at all, the cherry tree will bear cherries, the currant bush currants, the fig tree figs, and the vine grapes. “For every tree is known by its own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.” (Luke vi. 44.)

Now, why is this ?

First of all, because God has been pleased to

fix and ordain that so it should be. So we read in the Bible, that in the beginning, when God created every thing, He caused the earth to bring forth "grass, and herb yielding seed after its kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself after its kind: and God saw that it was good. (Gen. i. 11, 12.) "*After its kind*" means, that from the seed of each sort of plant should grow plants of the same sort. And if we ask how it is that plants go on, after so many thousands of years, each kind bearing seed "after its kind," the Bible answers,—“They continue this day according to Thine ordinances; for all are Thy servants. (Ps. cxix. 91.)

You are not to think that God made things just at first, and then left them to go on by themselves. That is impossible, because God is everywhere, at every moment, taking notice of every thing, caring for every thing and every body, and ruling all things according to His wise and good will. “His tender mercies are over all His works.” “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, that he may bring forth food out of the earth.” “He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the

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good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." He feeds the birds of the air, and clothes the flowers of the field. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." \*

When you grow older you will very likely read some very amusing and instructive books, by very clever men, who fancy that a long time ago it was quite different from what it is now; that no kind of creature remained always the same, "after its kind," but that every kind of plant and animal changed by degrees into some other kind,—fishes turning into birds, and mushrooms into trees; not all at once, you know, but little by little. It must have been a strange kind of world to live in, must it not! Indeed, in such a world, men could not manage to live, and it is difficult to guess how any animals could live; because, while they were slowly changing from one sort of creature to another, and were not fit to live either in water or air, mud or trees, they must surely have perished! But the fact is, that this is only a sort of fairy-land which these very clever men have invented out of their own heads, and

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\* Ps. cxlv. 9; civ. 14. Matt. v. 45; vi. 26-30. Acts xvii. 28.

See also Ps. cxlvii. 15-18.

with which you and I need not trouble ourselves; because in this real every-day world, things always go on according to the laws which God has fixed; and thus it comes to pass that we can never "gather figs of thistles."

Now, you know, if God had pleased, He could have made things on just the opposite plan. Instead of making each plant or animal according to one pattern, and governing all His creation by unchanging laws, God might have shown His power by endless change and variety. The only certain rule might have been that the offspring must never resemble their parents. A field sown with wheat (if there happened to be any wheat) might bear a crop half oats and half poppies. The seedling from a pine as tall as the mast of a ship might send out a dozen stems, like the spokes of a cart wheel. Ivy might spring from acorns, and oaks from hazel-nuts. Out of five eggs in the same nest might be hatched a skylark, a wren, a white dove, a black raven, and a crimson flamingo. Or, if things did not change so suddenly and wildly as that, yet God might have made them change more slowly, like dissolving views, so that at the end of a hundred or a thousand years there

might be quite a different set of plants and animals in the world. Now, WHY does God make all His works according to rule and law, so that from acorns always grow oaks, and nothing else, and from a hedge-sparrow's eggs are always hatched hedge-sparrows, and nothing else; and if any one gives you silk-moth's eggs, you know that out of them will come caterpillars that will spin silk; and so of all other creatures?

WHY has God made things so? Because it is the BEST WAY. God always does everything in the best and wisest way. If you do not know what is the best way to do a thing, you try several ways. Or if you are only amusing yourself, you may do a thing now this way, now that way. A little boy at play with toy bricks may build in any queer shape he pleases. But if an architect is building a house, and you ask him, "Why must the door be put here, and not there? Why must the bricks be put sideways, and not upright? Why are all the stairs the same height?" He will tell you, "*Because that is the proper way.*" There is always a right way of doing things. Suppose, again, that we are sailing about in a pleasure boat for amusement; we may sail here and there, just

as we please. But the great ship that is voyaging over the ocean to a distant land must keep her course, and sail steadily on. Why? Because that is the right course, that she may get safely and swiftly to the port she is bound to. The wiser any one is, and the more important and serious the work he has to do, the more certain it is that he will do it in the best way.

So you see, because God is perfectly wise and perfectly good, although He could do things in ten thousand different ways, He always pleases to do them in the best way.

Well, now I fancy you will ask me another question. Quite right. I like children to ask plenty of questions, if they are sensible questions; and I do not mind even silly questions, if you do not *mean* them to be silly, but really want to be taught. The question I fancy some sharp-witted boy or girl will ask is, "WHY is it the best way for all God's works to be made according to a rule and pattern, which must always be kept to? Why would it not be just as good every now and then to have a change, and sometimes to find grapes growing on a bramble-bush, and gather figs from thistles?" You think it would be great fun, don't

you? Perhaps it would. But then, you see, the world is not made for fun, but for earnest. It is not a great playground, where everybody may be idle; but a great workshop, where everything is busy, and everybody has some work to do. A little play and fun is good even for grown-up people; and for children a great deal is good, if it is of a good sort. But still, the world had to be made, not for play, but for work; and therefore *the best way* to make it was the way God chose, namely, that every creature should be 'after its kind,' and every tree be known by its fruit.

ONE reason is, *that we may know what to expect*. Just fancy how it would be, if we never knew what to expect. Suppose you asked a farmer in spring-time, "What is in this field?" and he had to answer, "Well, I *hope* beans, but the last time I planted beans they came up nettles." Or suppose when he sowed wheat, it came up part barley and part turnips; and that in a waste piece of ground that was last year full of thistles, this year a fine crop of wheat grew up from the thistle-seed. You see, if things went on in this fashion, there would be no use in farming at all. All useful work

depends on our knowing what will happen; and the only way in which we can know what will happen is by an acquaintance with the LAWS or RULES according to which God makes all things work.

ANOTHER reason is, that in this way God rewards diligence, and punishes sloth; rewards forethought, and punishes carelessness; rewards knowledge, and punishes ignorance. By letting us know what to expect, God shows that He means us to work. Too much work is not good for any body; but no work at all is far worse. If we wish to be healthy, we must work; if we wish to be happy, we must work; if we wish to be strong, we must work; if we wish to be wise, we must work.

If wheat and barley and maize grew wild on every moor, and forests of bread-fruit and olive and orange and apple trees spread over every valley and hill-side, who would care to plough and sow and plant? If garments hung ready-made on the trees, who would spin or weave? But God's word teaches, that they who will not work have no right to eat. (2 Thess. iii. 10.) Listen to what wise King Solomon says about lazy people:—

"I went by the field of the slothful,  
And by the vineyard of the man void of understanding ;  
And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns,  
And nettles had covered the face thereof,  
And the stone wall thereof was broken down.  
Then I saw, and considered it well :  
I looked upon it, and received instruction.  
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,  
A little folding of the hands to sleep.  
So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth ;  
And thy want as an armed man."

(PROV. xxiv. 30-34.)

Perhaps you are sometimes tempted to think that a life of idle pleasure, with plenty of money and no need to earn it, would be a happy life. No, it would not. People who have all that, very often find themselves puzzled how (as they say) to *kill time*; that is, they are so dull and unhappy they don't know what to do. Generally, the busiest people are the happiest and most cheerful.

Never forget that our Lord and Saviour, through the greatest part of His earthly life—till He was thirty years old—worked hard for his daily bread, and very likely to support His widowed mother. 'Oh, but,' (perhaps you will say) 'was not that part of His humiliation and suffering?' Yes: it was deep humiliation for the Son of God to become man. He "made Himself of no reputation, and

took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." (Phil. ii. 7.) He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. Perhaps He knew what it was to suffer hard times; and to meet with crooked-tempered grumblers, whom the best work would not please; and poor customers who could not pay, and dishonest ones who would not pay. But for all that, I do not doubt that He often tasted the healthful enjoyment of putting forth all one's strength and skill and patience in toil; and enjoyed the evening meal more because the day's work had paid for it; and delighted all the more for his day of patient labour to walk and meditate and pray, as the stars came forth, among the lovely quiet hills of Nazareth.

You know the Bible speaks of God himself as **WORKING**. He is called "He that ministereth seed to the sower." (2 Cor. ix. 10.) Christ said to the Jews (when they blamed Him for healing on the Sabbath), "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." (John v. 17.) Nobody is more unlike God than an idle person who hates work. Therefore, it is no wonder that God loves to reward good, honest, diligent work. And therefore, He will not let men gather *grapes from thorns or figs from thistles*.



We may find, I think, a THIRD reason; and that is, that God sees fit to bring the greatest things out of small beginnings. An acorn is a tiny thing. A baby may carry it in his hand. The little *germ* within the acorn, from which the young oak is to grow, is tinier still. Yet when that young oak shall have grown up into a full-sized tree, it may bear thousands of acorns every year; it may live 500 years, and whole forests of great strong oaks may grow from its fruit,—the fruit of one little acorn. All the coffee plants in the West Indies have sprung from one little plant that was carried from France to the island of Martinique by a Frenchman named Descleux.

## II.

Thus, then, I have shown you that men cannot gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, or any fruit but from its own proper plant, because it has pleased GOD to make every tree and herb "*after its kind.*" And we have found out THREE REASONS for this: First, that people may know what to expect: secondly, that diligent work may be rewarded; and thirdly, that great results may be caused to grow out of small beginnings. Now

there are a few things I want you to learn from all this.

(i.) "WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH, THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP."

If you want grapes, you must not plant thorns; nor sow thistles if you wish to gather figs. But is anybody ever so silly? Well, let us see.

There is a schoolboy, yawning over his lesson. He sits with his books before him, but he is not working. If we ask him why, he says, "Oh, I hate Latin!" Well, perhaps you like arithmetic better? "Oh no, I hate doing sums." Well, do you like geography? "Oh no, I hate geography worst of all." The real truth is, he hates work. He is *sowing thistles*; and by and by when his school-days are over, the prickles will sting him, and the empty, useless seed be a plague in his neighbours' fields.

There is a girl, who is more pleased with a new ribbon than with a new book, and who loves her looking-glass better than her Bible. All her thoughts run on dress and amusement. What is she doing? She is *planting thorns*; and well for her if some of them do not grow so long and sharp that some day they will pierce her heart and break it.

There is a bright, promising Sunday-scholar, who has got into his head the unhappy notion that he is getting too old to attend the Sunday-school. He has found companions who teach him that it is manly to idle away the precious Sabbath hours in the fields; manly to smoke, manly to drink, manly to gamble. He gives up his old teachers for these new ones. Ten or fifteen years pass away. Who is that shabbily-dressed, shuffling, red-faced man, who has lost one situation after another, and can find no one to give him a character? Can it possibly be that bright-faced, promising lad? Has he come to this? Alas, he too is reaping as he has sown. He sowed what his companions called his "wild oats;" but they were thorns, sharp and strong and poisonous. "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." (Gal. vi. 8.)

But is it not true (you may ask) that many who have spent some years of their youth in folly and sin, and wasted much precious time in idle amusement, have nevertheless afterwards become good and useful men? Yes, this is true,—true of not a few who were brought up in godly, Christian homes. But they had to reap a bitter and painful

crop of repentance, and never ceased to look back on that part of their life with shame and sorrow. What would you think if a farmer were to sow his land with thorns, and thistles, and darnel, and poppies, and to tell you that he did this for amusement, and would have plenty of time to plough them up and burn them, and then sow his land with good seed? Would you not think he was mad not to begin with the good seed? Depend on it, it is hard work grubbing up and burning weeds. Hard work getting back into the right way, if once you stray from it. Hard work climbing out of the quagmire, if once you are foolish enough to fall into it. Hard work pumping the water out of a sinking ship, though it might have been easy to stop the leak at first. Sad and weary work to be sowing and planting when you ought to be reaping and gathering. Wisdom's promise is, "Those that seek me early shall find me." "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Prov. viii. 17; Gal. vi. 8.)

(ii.) HE THAT WOULD REAP MUST SOW.

If we want to gather figs, we must plant figs: and if grapes, we must plant vines. And they must have time to grow, too. "Ill weeds," the

proverb says, "grow apace." But "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it." (James v. 7.) So it is with our own life. It would not matter so much wasting a year or two, if we could root up bad habits and plant good ones in ourselves all in a minute. But they want time to grow. Suppose you want to be able to speak French, and I bring you a Dictionary and a Grammar, and say, "There is the French language; speak it!" You know that would be of no use. All the language is in those books; but to get it *into your mind*, so that you can talk it, needs weeks and months and years of study and practice. It is the same with music, or drawing, or botany, or chemistry, or anything worth learning. And if you are to be a true Christian, to love God, and trust, and follow, and serve the Lord Jesus, and to be wise, and brave, and true, and loving, and useful; this cannot be all on a sudden. You must not be disappointed if you do not find it easy to be good; or even if you fall again into faults you thought you had conquered. We do not expect an apple tree to have ripe fruit when it is only time for it to be in bloom. If it blossoms, well;

we have patience, and say, "There will be fruit by and by." And we do not expect a young tree to bear a load of fruit. If it has only one apple of the right sort, we are encouraged to hope for more another year.

(iii.) THE TREE IS KNOWN BY ITS FRUIT.

Some young Christians (and some old ones too) are in great trouble, and think they cannot be real Christians, because they do not love God more, and are not more like Jesus Christ. That is as if the young apple tree were to say, "I cannot be a real apple tree, because I have only one apple." If you love the Lord Jesus *at all*, you must be a real Christian, though perhaps a very young and weak one. 'But how can I know that I have *any* love to Him?' By seeing *whether you are trying to please Him*. For He says, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." (John xiv. 21.)

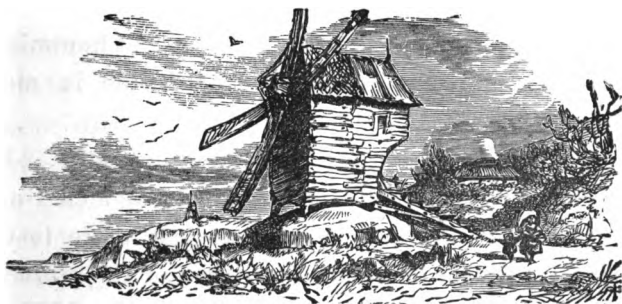
Our Lord, you remember, compares His disciples to vine branches. Now, how do the vine branches come to "bear much fruit"? Not by being stuck full-grown into the vine, but by beginning as little green buds, and *abiding* in the vine, till they grow strong and fruitful. And so

our Lord also compares true faith in Him to the growth of the corn: "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." (Mark iv. 28.)

(iv.) Remember one thing more. **YOU ARE ALWAYS SOWING** some sort of seed, good or evil. Where? In other people's minds and memories, and in your own. I have known a foolish, ill-natured speech spring up in remembrance twenty years afterwards. It was a thistle that never ceased to prick and sting. And very great things, good and bad, grow out of tiny seeds. A single spark may set a city on fire. A small leak may sink a great ship. A speck of dry rot in a single timber may bring a great building to ruin. A minute too late may miss the train. A letter forgotten to be posted may cause trouble for years. One hour of sinful folly may destroy a good character, and ruin the happiness of a lifetime.

All the thistles in Australia, they say, sprung from a few thistle-downs, brought over by a Scotchman, who thought he should like to have a Scottish thistle in his garden. Nobody thanks that Scotchman. He did not mean any harm; but thoughtlessness often does as much mischief as malice. Try to be a sower of good seed, in other

people's gardens, as well as your own. How? By kind words, kind looks, kind actions; by being 'faithful in that which is least,' and true and honest in all things. A good, bright, noble example is the best seed any of us can sow in this world. Ask God to give you the good seed in your own heart: that is, His word, the love of Christ, and the grace of the Holy Spirit. And that you "be not weary in well-doing," remember the promise,—  
"IN DUE SEASON WE SHALL REAP IF WE FAINT NOT." (Gal. vi. 9.)







## OUTSIDES AND INSIDES.



OUR LORD JESUS once put a very curious question to the Pharisees—  
“DID NOT HE THAT MADE THAT WHICH IS WITHOUT MAKE THAT WHICH IS WITHIN ALSO?” (Luke xi. 40.) You know “He” means God. God’s works are very wonderful on the outside, and often how beautiful! Flowers, for instance, and rainbows, and humming-birds, and butterflies. But the inside is more wonderful still.

Suppose a sculptor is making a statue. He begins at the outside of the block, and cuts and chips away the marble, till at last there is the statue. But who made the *inside* of the statue—the marble of which it is formed? God. Millions of millions of tiny creatures, swimming in a chalky sea, made their tiny shells, too tiny for us to see

except with a microscope; and then they sank and hardened into stone. And then the fire which is inside the earth almost melted the stone, and turned it into beautiful white marble. That was the way, wise and learned men tell us, in which God made the *inside* of the marble block out of which the statue is carved.

But suppose a carpenter makes a box. Does not he make the inside of the box as well as the outside? Yes, *of the box*. The inside of the box comes by just putting the sides and bottom and top together. But the carpenter does not make *the inside of the wood* out of which the box is cut. If you had a slice of that wood as thin as tissue paper, and looked at it through a microscope, you would find it made up of rings, and those rings made of tiny cells, as tiny as the little shells that were used to make the limestone. Perhaps the tree took a hundred years from the time it began to grow from the seed, to the time when it was cut down—growing, growing, growing; making a new ring of wood inside its thick bark every year. Who made it grow? GOD.

But do men never make the inside of a thing as well as the outside? Well, yes, of some things.

Suppose you are reading a book—let us say “The Pilgrim’s Progress;” and I ask you, “Who made that book? Who was the author of it?” “John Bunyan.” What! did he make the paper, or the print, or the pictures, or even the cover? No, he made none of these; but he *made the story*, the thoughts, and words, and meaning of the book. So you see the printed words and paper and cover are like the body of the book, and the meaning is like the *soul*.

Even the Bible will do you no good if you only learn the *words*, and do not understand the *meaning*. This is what our Saviour means when He says, “Ye shall know the truth.” (John viii. 32.)

I want you to make up your mind never to be content with the outsides of things, but to try to learn something about the inside. And do you know, odd as it may seem, there are some things in which people often make mistakes as to *which* is the inside!

Now, instead of any more talk about this, I will tell you a fable; and if you do not understand its meaning—*its inside*—plant it in your memory, and perhaps some day the meaning will peep out, like a crocus out of its bulb.

## THE CLOAK: A FABLE.

A fair child lay asleep on a sunny bank. His folded cloak lay lightly over his gentle limbs. It was woven without seam, but of two colours—purple on one side, white on the other. A wondrous cloak!

Two sages chanced to pass that way. Said one, "How gorgeous is this lovely purple cloak with its white lining!"

"Pardon me," said the other sage, "the cloak is pure white, with a purple lining."

"Do not speak so loud," replied the first, "you will wake the child."

"You fear to wake him," rejoined the second, "lest he put on his white garment and show your error."

"My error!" shouted the first, seizing the cloak. "Any one can see by the purple sleeves that the cloak is purple; the white is the inside."

"A man must be blind indeed," cried the second, also grasping the precious mantle, "not to see that the sleeves have been pulled inside out in taking off the cloak. They are snow-white."

In their eager contention, the two sages rent the garment in twain. Just then, a traveller pass-

ing by asked them what they were disputing about so fiercely.

“He mistakes the outside of the child’s cloak for the inside!” cried the first sage.

“He has robbed the fair child of his beautiful cloak,” exclaimed the other, fiercely, “in trying to turn it inside out.”

“What child?” asked the traveller.

The fair child was gone.





## LILY LESSONS.



WHEN the Queen of Sheba came to visit King Solomon, and saw "the house that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers and their apparel, his cup-bearers also and their apparel," she was so amazed at it all that "there was no more spirit in her." Suppose some one had then said, "I will shew you a more glorious sight than this;" and leading her out into the country, had shown her a grassy meadow full of lilies; would not the Queen and all her courtiers have thought he was making sport, or else that he was a strangely ignorant person, who did not know what glory is? Yet this is just what our

Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, and says to you and me also:—

“CONSIDER THE LILIES OF THE FIELD, HOW THEY GROW; THEY TOIL NOT, NEITHER DO THEY SPIN; AND YET I SAY UNTO YOU THAT EVEN SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY WAS NOT ARRAYED LIKE ONE OF THESE.”—Matthew vi. 28, 29.

Let us consider the lilies.

You would have a gorgeous nosegay indeed, if I could hand you in one bunch all the different sorts of flowers which different persons have supposed to be *the* lily at which our Lord was looking when He spoke these words. There is the pure white lily, which is more like a queen, or white-robed priestess, than a king; the golden amaryllis, the purple lily, the crown imperial lily, the splendid scarlet Turk's-cap lily of Galilee, the sweet lily of the valley, and I know not how many more. But even if we had them all growing in our gardens, they do not bloom at one time of the year; so we could not make a nosegay of them. And this reminds me, that even if we held a bunch of them all in our hand fresh plucked, with the morning dew on their shining petals, we could learn but a small part of the lessons our Saviour would

teach us; for you see He does not say "*how they look*," but "*how they grow*." It is not enough to gather them; we must watch them growing through all the seasons of the changing year. When the short days and long nights tell that Winter is at hand, brush away the dry leaves which Autumn has scattered, dig through the black mould, and uncover the bulb lying asleep there underground. What a dark, unsightly thing it is! Who could ever fancy that life lies hidden in it, or that beauty can come forth from it? Wait and watch, till the breath of Spring begins to soften the keen wintry air, and the soil that had grown hard as iron under the icy wheels of Winter's chariot, waxes moist and yielding. See the green glossy beak silently thrusting itself up into air and daylight. Watch the leaves unfold from their prison-cradle. See the stem lift its slender, graceful column heavenward, and the flower buds swell and burst, till at last the perfect crown of flowers unfolds its beauty, and sheds its perfume in the summer sunshine.

Consider the lilies! What, think you, can they teach us?

I. One of their first lessons is a lesson of



WONDER and DELIGHT in contemplating the works of God. It is a great and precious gift from God, to have an eye for nature, and a strong love for nature: an eye to see, and a heart to delight in the marvellous variety and beauty of the objects around us—flowers, trees, butterflies, birds, mountains, streams, clouds, and all the numberless forms of God's creatures. But I mean more than this. I mean that we are to delight in them and admire them *as God's workmanship*. Their beauty, wonderfulness, usefulness, are all from Him. All were in His thoughts before any of them had any being, "when as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world,"—that is, the very atoms or elements of which it is made.\* Every moment they draw their being from Him, and speak to us of His wisdom, power, and mercy. "O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches." "Marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well."†

Many persons marvel only at what is new and strange. If one of their apple trees yielded plums; or if they sowed mignonette and it grew up nettles,

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\* Proverbs viii. 26.

† Psalm civ. 64; cxxxix. 30.

then they would indeed wonder. But when the apple tree puts forth every Spring its delicate white and pink blossoms, when the tiny green apple forms in the heart of the withering flower, and swells and ripens into rich sweet fruit; when from a pinch of dry seed, that looks as lifeless as so many grains of sand, spring hundreds of flowers, perfuming the air with their fragrance, exactly like those flowers from which the dry seed was gathered; then these people say, "Why there's nothing wonderful in that! They always do so. I've seen it a hundred times before." Very likely, but can you explain it? Can anybody else understand it? To wonder only at what is new and surprising, shows sad want of thought. Wise people know that some of the most wonderful things are to be seen every day. David tells us in Psalm viii. how he wondered at the stars and the moon; and in Psalm cxxxix. how he wondered at his own body. Men of science, studying these things all their life, continually discover fresh wonders. So the Lord says, "Consider the lilies," the wild flowers of the meadow and the mountains. See how God clothes the grass of the field. You do not need to look at God's great works to discern deep lessons of

His power, wisdom, and goodness: you may read them even in His least.

Learn to love the study of God's works. What God has thought it worth His while to make, must certainly be worth our while to study. Do not be discouraged by the hard names which books give to plants, animals, stones, and other substances. Men make the names, and often make them very clumsily; but God makes the things. Those of you who live in great cities or towns, are shut out from the free view which country children enjoy of God's works in the fields, the woods, and the waters. Then you must try to make the most of a little. One or two flowers or ferns will grow, with care, in pots, in your bed-room window. Or you can get a bowl of water, and with some pebbles or bits of broken pot, a bit of pond weed, and a few water-snails and tiny fishes, you can have a little world of wonders. And when you get your holiday in the country, or by the sea-side, you must open your eyes and ears, and ask questions of every beetle, and leaf and blossom, and dewdrop you see; and if rightly questioned, you will find they all give the same answer which St. Paul and David found in all creation: "The

invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." "All Thy works shall praise Thee, O LORD." "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for He commanded and they were created."\* They all join in the song of the stars:—

"In reason's ear they all rejoice,  
And utter forth a glorious voice;  
For ever singing as they shine,  
'The hand that made us is Divine.'"

II. Another lesson our Lord Jesus would have us learn from the lilies is, to ADMIRE AND LOVE what is BEAUTIFUL. He specially calls attention to their beauty;—how God *clothes* them. "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Some people take no account of beauty. "Give us what is useful," they say, "and never mind about its being beautiful." Some very good people are even afraid of beauty, or, at all events, of the love of anything for the sake of its beauty. They think it dangerous. They are mistaken. The

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\* Romans i. 20. Psalm cxlv. 10; cxlviii. 5.

love of any false, cheating kind of beauty is mischievous; but not of real beauty, for it is God who 'hath made everything beautiful in its time,' and has given us the sense of beauty. It cannot be wrong to admire, or right to despise, what He has made on purpose to be admired. Now, of all God's works, none are so evidently made for the sake of beauty as flowers. I know scarcely anything which gives us more wonderful thoughts of God than to gather some little wayside flower,—'a weed'—and see the pains God has taken to make it beautiful. If you try to make a careful coloured drawing of it, you will find out, after an hour's study and work, how much more beautiful it is than you thought. If beauty were as useless as some people think, all this exquisite Divine workmanship would be wasted.

It is sometimes said that ALL God's works are beautiful. So they are, if by 'beauty' we mean contrivance, skill, and finish; but all are not beautiful to look at, and plainly are not meant to be so. It is as plain that a baboon, a gecko, or a scorpion, was meant to be hideous, as that a rose or a gazelle was meant to be lovely. Frightful creatures may be meant partly to show off beauty

by contrast, partly to teach us that there may be good qualities under an ugly outside (as, for instance, the care of the horrible-looking Surinam toad for its offspring); and besides this, I believe they are intended to give us images—live pictures, as it were—of the hidden evil of our hearts, and the ugliness of sin. Many creatures God has made plain, though not ugly, that beauty might be the more admired as choice and rare. But, on the whole, He has clothed the world in beauty as a garment, and has fitted us to perceive and to delight in it.

One of the most noticeable things concerning the beauty of God's works is this,—that it is never *stuck on* as mere outside show, but grows out of their nature. Men often make a thing ugly first, and then cover it up with paint, or plaster, or gilding, to make it beautiful. God never does so. You will find no sham ornaments on His works. The shape He gives to each creature is just that which is fitted for it; and the colour with which He adorns it will never wash off. In His great workshop, truth and beauty go together. This is one reason why our Lord says that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of the field

lilies. Solomon's glory was all put on outside. If his crown and robes had been stripped off, and he had been clothed in rags, no one would have known him for a king. But you cannot strip the beauty off from a lily or a rose, unless you destroy its substance. I have seen a young person gaily dressed, evidently very much delighted with the thought that every one was admiring her; whereas they were not admiring *her* at all, only her clothes, and the cleverness and taste of her dressmaker; perhaps laughing all the while at her vanity and extravagance. It would have been much better for her if she had taken St. Peter's advice: "Be clothed with humility." I have seen, too, a pretty girl, vain of the beauty God has given her, smiling to show her fine teeth; and showing something else too—her silly vanity, so that one could not help despising her, instead of admiring. And I have passed a cottage door, and seen a homely-featured woman standing with her baby in her arms, never dreaming of anybody looking at her; but just then the baby crowed, and the mother smiled at her child, and the motherly love and tender joy in her heart lit up her face with a gleam of perfect beauty; and I thought how much

the beauty which *comes from within* excels that which is only on the outside. Sometimes, too, you may see a face that sickness has bleached and wasted, and on which death will soon set its seal, looking more beautiful than ever it did in the bloom of youthful health; because lighted up with the unearthly joy of a heart at peace with God, and almost in sight of Heaven.

Thus it will be in Heaven. The beauty of Heaven is "the beauty of holiness,"—the beauty which springs from within. No painted righteousness, or gilded goodness, or false outside show, will be found there. When God *covers* sin by forgiving it, He does not leave it festering and defiling the inside of our nature. He purifies the soul through obeying the truth.

"Round the altar, priests confess,  
If their robes are white as snow,  
Tis their Saviour's righteousness,  
And His blood, that made them so."

Consider, then, the lilies, how they grow up out of the dark earth, nourished by the moisture, and air, and light, in the beauty which God has prepared for them, just by living the life He has appointed for them. Even so in this dark world,

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in the wintry weather of weakness, trouble, and temptation, "light is sown for the righteous." God is forming in the souls of His children His own image, implanting and cherishing a hidden life, like that of the lily bulb in winter; till the time comes to transplant them one by one into His upper garden, the Paradise of God, to bloom in our Saviour's presence for evermore.

III. There are many other lessons, but I must say only a few words about them. We may learn from the lilies a lesson of DILIGENCE. How so? They toil not, neither do they spin, and God clothes them, just as He feeds the birds of the air, which sow not, neither do they reap. Men must toil and spin, and sow and reap, and build and forge, and dig deep into the earth, and sail far over the ocean, if they are to enjoy God's gifts. Are you ready to say, "Happy birds of the air! enviable lilies of the field! why cannot our Heavenly Father care for us as for you?" Just because God does care *so much more* for us than for them, He gives us work to do which they cannot do, and lessons to learn which they cannot learn, though they may help us to learn them.

“Are ye not much better than they?” our Saviour asks. “Shall He not MUCH MORE clothe you?” The lilies and birds cannot know the hand that feeds and clothes them. You can: and just because you are a creature of so much nobler kind, God will not pour out His gifts on you as on them; but will have you ask that you may receive; and seek that you may find; and toil and strive, that you may be blessed in your deed, reap bountifully when you have sown bountifully, and enrich others from the blessings with which God is enriching you.

So, too, it is in spiritual things. Perhaps you have been puzzled (as older people often are) to think why God lets any one sin and suffer. Why does He not make us all good and happy, just as He makes the bees industrious, and the birds careful and self-denying for their young, and the lilies beautiful? Because it would be such a poor sort of goodness and happiness; like that of beasts and birds, and insects, not like that of angels, of Christ, of God. Our goodness, if we have any, is as truly God’s work as though He took away our power to do evil, and made us good without any trouble of ours. But He brings it about by

leading us to seek Him with all our heart, to strive against sin, to follow after holiness. As St. Paul says, God will have us *work out our own salvation*, BECAUSE it is He who worketh in us, both to will and to do.\*

IV. Let the lilies teach you a lesson of PATIENCE AND PUNCTUALITY. The flowers of Spring do not bloom in Autumn, nor those of Midsummer in Spring. Every blossom has its season. Consider how they grow;—so slowly that if you watched all day you would not see them grow; but incessantly, till at last, in due season, there is the perfect crown of flowers. The *purpose* of the lily was there all the time, from the beginning. Where? Not in the mind of the lily, because it has no mind, but in the mind of God. He always meant it to be a lily, and nothing but a lily. Just suppose the bulb could think, and choose for itself, and were to say, “I would rather be a tulip—no, a primrose—no, a rosebush—no, after all, why not a lily?” and that it grew now a leaf of one plant, now a sprout of another, would it ever be anything worth looking at? Every one

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\* Phil. ii. 12, 13.

of God's works is made to a set pattern, and all of a piece. Just so, if your life is to be beautiful, and useful, and noble, it must have a right purpose running through it, making it all of one piece. You must learn, like St. Paul, to "press toward the mark;" aim at what God's word teaches you to aim at, and then follow this purpose patiently, unswervingly; "growing up in all things unto Him who is the Head, even Christ." A well-spent life is not made up of sudden bounds and lucky movements, and great things done by quick strokes of skill or fortune; but is one in which the minutes have been redeemed, the footsteps carefully set, each day's task done patiently and faithfully.

"The heights by great men won and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight;  
But these, while their companions slept,  
Went toiling upwards in the night."

V. The lilies teach us, I think, a lesson of TOLERANCE; that is, bearing generously and patiently with those whose opinions do not agree with our own, but who may be wise men and good Christians for all that. Lilies and roses and oaks grow all in obedience to the same great laws,

but yet each after its own pattern. It would be a great pity if all the lilies could be turned into roses, or all the roses into lilies, or all trees and all flowers made just to the same pattern. Their variety is great part of their beauty. God's great garden has room for all, need for all. Even of lilies there are divers colours, and many sorts. Just so, it is both foolish and wrong to be angry with people because they do not think just as we think, feel as we feel, and speak as we speak. In God's Church, as in the garden and the forest, there is room for variety. It would be a loss, not a gain, if all Christians held exactly the same opinions, and worshipped in exactly the same forms. Even the lilies may teach us that.

VI. Last but not least, we are to learn from the lilies a LESSON OF FAITH. This is, indeed, the grand lesson, for the special sake of which our gracious Saviour bids us 'consider the lilies.' Read from verse 25 to verse 34. Our Lord tells us not to '*take thought*' about our life, what we shall eat or drink, or about our body, what we shall put on. That is, we are not to be *anxious*, or over-careful about these things. In old English, the

word 'thought' meant 'care and anxiety.' What our Lord means is not that wise, useful care in making needful preparation for to-morrow which belongs really to to-day's work; but that useless, worrying care about what may or may not happen, and what we shall do if this or that misfortune should befall us, which does not help us a bit, but only hinders our work, and clouds our mind with needless trouble. Look, then, our Saviour says, at the happy, careless birds. Who keeps house for them? Consider the lovely flowers. Who dresses them? Your Heavenly Father. He is *their* Creator, but *your* Father. Will not He much more care for you, and does not He know all your need? Therefore trust Him, thankfully, humbly, undoubtingly, continually.

Did you ever read the story of Mungo Park, the great African traveller, and the moss? In a vast wilderness, five hundred miles away from any white men, he fell among robbers, who stripped him of nearly everything, and left him alone to die. As he sat on the ground in despair, with no prospect but of being starved to death, a tiny but extremely beautiful moss caught his eye, growing on a stone. As he gazed upon it, his hope and

faith revived. For, thought he, if God has taken so much pains with this minute plant, in such a desolate wilderness, surely He will much more care for me, and not leave me to perish! Accordingly, weary and lonely though he was, he took courage to resume his journey, and God guided him to a place of safety. When Hagar was wandering in the desert, like to die, God sent an angel to her; and so He did to Elijah. But He who created and rules all things can when He pleases make a tiny tuft of moss on a stone His angel of mercy, and the lilies of the field His prophets and preachers of truth.

Yes, Nature is full of these lessons; but he only can read them who knows that God is his Father; who sees in all things, from the flower at his foot to the stars above his head, the works of His Father's hand. He can say, even in a desolate wilderness, "I am not alone, for my Father is with me."

"His are the mountains, and the valleys his,  
And the resplendent rivers; his to enjoy  
With a propriety that none can feel,  
But who with filial confidence inspired  
Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye,  
And smiling say, My Father made them all."\*

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\* THE TASK, Book V.

But *how do we know* that God is our Father? The lilies could never tell us this, if our Saviour had not explained their lessons. Mungo Park would never have learned it from the moss, if he had not first learned it from the Bible. The moss would rather have seemed to say, "Here I live on my stone till the drought withers me, or the foot of some wild beast crushes me, or the sand of the desert buries me; and what will it matter? there will only be a tuft of moss the less in the world; and other mosses will grow and bloom as gaily. And so, too, you will die of thirst or be devoured by a wild beast, or caught and buried in the sand-storm; and what will it matter? Others will grow up and enjoy life, and the world will go on just the same." That, I think, would have been the moss's sermon, if there were no Bible, and no Gospel; and a sad sermon it would be, would it not? But when our Lord Jesus Christ says, "YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER feeds the birds, and clothes the lilies, and will much more feed and clothe you, because He knows that you have need of all these things,"—then all nature begins to speak a new language; then we find tongues in trees and sermons in stones; then the heavens



rejoice, and the earth is glad, the field is joyful and all that is therein, and all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord. If the great God who made all things is OUR FATHER, then indeed we may be happily free from care, thankfully casting all our care upon Him, because He careth for us.

How do we know this? Because He himself has told us so, and has sent His own beloved Son to reveal to us His love, and to be both our Teacher and our Saviour. "No man knoweth who the Father is but the Son, and He to whom the Son will reveal Him." "He that hath seen me," said Jesus, "hath seen the Father." "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

CONSIDER THE LILIES.



## A JEWEL OF PRICE.



CERTAIN thing is declared in Scripture to be "in the sight of God of great price." Everything, you know, *is in God's sight*; that is, God sees and knows all things.

Not the tiniest atom in the very heart of the earth, not the faintest twinkle of the furthest star, not a passing smile or frown on your face, or a secret thought in your mind, can be hidden from God. He sees everything, knows everything, foresees everything, forgets nothing. But more than this is meant when a thing is said to be precious *in God's sight*. It means that He takes notice of it, is pleased with it, and wishes us to admire and count it precious.

Things often look very different to us from what they really are. Coloured glass may look like precious stones. Gilded paper or wood may look like gold. Artificial flowers may be so like real ones that at a little distance no one can tell which is which. But God sees things as they really are. When Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, and Eliab was so handsome and tall and strong that Samuel thought surely it must be he whom God had chosen to be king of Israel, the Lord said to Samuel, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (1 Sam. xvi. 7.)

Even outward beauty is God's work, and He means it to be admired; but it is not this which He reckons "of great price;" and for this reason, among others, that it so quickly perishes. The loveliest flowers soon wither, and all their beauty is gone. The fairest face may in a moment be made unsightly by a blow, or disfigured by disease. The most beautiful landscape may in a few minutes be darkened with tempest or blotted out with fog. The most precious kind of beauty

must be inward, not only on the outside; durable, not withering; something which will grow more and more beautiful the older it grows.

Well, what is this precious thing—precious even in God's sight? Silver or gold, pearls or diamonds, rare and curious and costly works of art, such as princes treasure in their palaces? No; none of these things. Nothing of the sort. Something which the poorest peasant or the youngest child may have. And, strange to say, something which no one who really has it can be proud of. It is "*the ornament of* A MEEK AND QUIET SPIRIT, which is in the sight of God of great price." (1 Pet. iii. 4.) This, you see, is *beauty of mind*, or, as we sometimes say, beauty of character. St. Peter calls it "the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible." And yet he calls it an "*adorning*," an "*ornament*," which means something beautiful to look at, because, you know, people cannot help showing what sort of temper and spirit they have—haughty or lowly, sour or sweet, cross or gentle, hasty or patient, selfish and spiteful, or generous and forgiving—by their words, and tones, and looks, as well as actions.

A certain statesman had once been a poor lad, but had raised himself by his talents and industry. A rich but vulgar-spirited man, who wished to mortify him, said to him very rudely, "I remember when you blacked my father's boots!" Instead of losing his temper and answering this insult angrily, he simply said, "*And did I not black them well?*" That was beautiful, was it not? That was the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit."

And why is such a spirit "of great price" in God's account? Because it is like the Lord Jesus, of whom the voice from Heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." When the people in a Samaritan village refused to give Him a supper or a night's lodging, His apostles James and John were so angry that they wished to call down fire from heaven to burn up those rude villagers with their houses. But Jesus "rebuked them and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And instead of smiting those Samaritans dead, Jesus only punished them by going away from them to

another village. When He stood before the high priest, and one of the officers struck Him with the palm of his hand, Jesus could have smitten him with palsy, or struck him dead; but He only said, very quietly, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"

Well might He say, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." And you may learn from Him, that in being "of a lowly spirit with the humble," patient under insult, cool and calm under provocation, gentle and forbearing to all, there is nothing cowardly, mean, or weak. On the contrary, when our Saviour suffered Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter, and opened not His mouth, He was going to do the bravest and noblest and greatest thing ever done; to lay down His life for us, of His own free will, and to redeem and save us by His death.

Now suppose you find out all the texts I have been talking about?





## THE MARVELLOUS MEAL.



O you ever make Bible Pictures? I do not mean with paint and brushes, on paper or canvas. But with words. It is a delightful amusement on a Sunday afternoon, round the fireside, or at the tea-table. Each takes his turn and describes some Scripture scene—place, people, and what is happening—as if he could see it all; and the rest guess what it is. Now I wish to make such a picture for you, and to have a little talk about it; just as though we could all sit round one huge fire-place or vast tea-table. What a wonderful thing is printing, which makes it possible to talk at a hundred firesides all at once!

### I.

I FANCY myself standing on a green hill-side clothed with long soft grass. Beneath me is a

beautiful lake, girdled with mountains and hills. The morning sunshine strikes full upon the mountains on the opposite side of the lake. The hill on which I am standing casts its shadow across the lake. Looking to my left I see the lake stretching away southward for miles, in sun and shadow, till it is hidden among distant hills. Looking to my right, I see a stream flowing with strong current into the clear blue lake, as if joyful to get free from its narrow banks. Thickets of oleander, flushing with pink blossoms, grow close to the water. Some distance up the river I perceive the walls and towers and flat roofs of a city. All along the northern end of the lake, and the western shore, the plain from the foot of the hills to the water's edge, is green with cornfields and trees, and white with towns and villages, all bathed in sunshine. From every town and hamlet, along the water side and down the green uplands, I see strings and groups of people, like moving dots, all moving one way: coming out by hundreds from the towns; by dozens or by twos and threes from every group of flat-roofed cottages. They seem hastening, as if some great occasion drew them all towards the river that pours among its



oleanders into the lake. What is it? On the lake I see many fishing boats, some with sails, some without; many, too, I can discern drawn upon the beach. Wild birds skim the water and wheel through the air. All is full of life and beauty, for it is that sweet time of the year when Summer has come, and Spring has not yet departed.

See! across the lake, a large boat, with a dozen or more persons on board, is sailing straight towards the spot where I stand. Nearer she comes; nearer; now her keel touches the sand; the sail is furled and lowered, mast and all, in a twinkling. One after another the men leap ashore; strong, sunburned men, most of them, looking like fishermen. They seize a rope, and prepare to drag the boat up on the beach. But they wait till One steps ashore, who looks quite different from all the rest. He is very plainly dressed, but for all that, He looks like a king. It would seem the most natural thing possible to kneel at His feet. The men regard Him with looks of homage and love, and gather round Him as He leads the way up the green hill-side to a cool quiet resting-place.

You have guessed my picture by this time, have you not? The lake is the Lake of Galilee. The

boat carried Jesus and His twelve chosen disciples, whom He named Apostles or Missionaries. They had been away from Him, on their first missionary tour, journeying on foot from town to town, preaching what He had taught them, and working miracles with the power which He had bestowed when He sent them forth, saying, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." When they returned (having spent, I suppose, the winter in their mission), they had much to tell and to ask; and the Lord, seeing them in need of quiet and rest, said to them, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile." \*

Jesus must have needed rest as much as they did; for we are told "there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." But it was not of himself He thought, but of His disciples. Do you wish to be a real disciple of the Lord Jesus,—really like Him? Then there is nothing you must more earnestly seek than this,—to be unselfish. Some people say that all sin consists in selfishness. At all events, it is the commonest, and I suppose I may say the

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\* Matt. x. 8. Mark vi. 7-12, 30-32.

most natural, kind of sin; and one of the very hardest to conquer. It can be seen in the smallest things as well as in the greatest; and very often others can see it in us when we do not notice it ourselves. We cannot overcome it in our own strength, but we may in His of whom it is written, "Even Christ pleased not himself." "Look not every one on his own things, but every one also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."\*

## II.

I SEE a second picture, more beautiful and wonderful than the first.

While Jesus and His disciples are resting on the quiet mountain side, the multitudes of people have crossed the Jordan, and are crowding towards the spot where the boat is drawn ashore. The Saviour's heart is filled with compassion, and He goes down to meet them. Can you imagine you see them? On they come, in hundreds, in thousands; the strong and youthful pressing on in front; the sick, the infirm, the women and children hastening up as well as they can behind.

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\* Rom. xv. iii. Phil. ii. 4, 5.

Jesus is soon surrounded, and no longer thinking of rest, but hard at work, talking to one party of eager listeners after another, and healing those who are brought to be healed. Here a blind man is led along by a little child. There a sister helps along her crippled brother. Here a rich man sick unto death is carried in a litter by four strong slaves. There a mother, half fainting with her long walk in the hot sun, carries her poor little sick child. There, by themselves, stand a party of miserable lepers, from whom all shrink with disgust, so frightful are they to look upon: they lift up their voices and cry aloud—"Jesus! Son of David! have mercy on us!" Some are groaning with pain; some weeping for sorrow; some trembling with impatience and hope; and some are dragged along by their friends, shrieking and struggling, for they are possessed and driven mad by evil spirits, and are afraid to come to Christ.

See! As the Saviour moves among them,—touching one, speaking to another, refusing none that come to Him,—what a wonderful change comes over the picture! It is like the sun scattering the clouds. The blind man finds his darkness flee away in a moment, and beholds the

face of Jesus—a sight he can never forget; and looks on the bright sky, the green hills, the blue lake, the multitude of faces, in a bewilderment of happiness. The lame man leaps like a hart. The tongue of the dumb sings for joy. The mother forgets her weariness, and weeps for gladness as she looks at the rosy cheeks and bright eyes and merry laugh of what a few moments ago was her dying child. The poor lepers can scarcely believe that their deadly plague is healed: and they touch their smooth healthy skin, and look at one another's limbs and faces, lately so hideous, now healthful and comely; and almost fear it is a dream, from which they will awake to their old misery. No! It is no dream. HE has touched the poor outcasts, whom no one else would touch. He has said—“*I will, be thou clean;*” and not one spot of leprosy remains. Very various, too, is the behaviour of those who have been healed. Some fall at the feet of Jesus, and with loud voices glorify God. Some rush into the arms of their friends, who weep over them for joy. Some hurry off to their homes. Some keep as close to Jesus as they can, and feel as if they could never bear to leave Him again.

It is very sad to think that many may have been healed of disease by Jesus, or received their sight, hearing, speech, or the use of their limbs, who yet never became His true disciples. They were content that He should save their bodies only, not their souls. We read that once, when He healed ten lepers, only one of them even stopped to thank Him. Just so, while every one is receiving ten thousand daily gifts from God, multitudes forget to praise Him, and care not for His forgiveness and love. Are YOU one of those thoughtless, thankless ones? You may read about Jesus, and sing hymns about Him, and yet never be His true disciple. But if you see and feel your need of Him as your Saviour from sin, then you will rejoice to say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me;" and you will love Him because He first loved you.

### III.

THE hot noon has passed; the afternoon is wearing away; and the mountain shadows point towards us across the lake. Many of the people are sitting or lying on the grass, faint with hunger and fatigue. The disciples at last come to their Master and ask if He will not send the people

away; that they may go into the villages and buy food, before the sun sets and night comes on. To their amazement Jesus answers—"They need not depart; give ye them to eat." He had not forgotten that the multitude would want food. He knew what He was going to do; but as He was wont to question His disciples, He asked Philip what was to be done. Philip answered that six or seven guineas' worth of bread would not be enough to afford each a few mouthfuls.\* The Lord then bade His disciples see what they could find. They brought word that there was a lad who had in his basket five cakes of barley-bread and two small salted fish. "Bring them (said Jesus) hither to Me." I wonder whether the lad objected to give up his basket, and whether the disciples paid him for it, or whether he gladly gave it as soon as he knew that the Lord asked it. If so, what an honour and happiness for him to supply the provision out of which the Lord fed all that multitude! He was repaid, as money could not have paid him. Doubtless the Lord Jesus

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\* "Two hundred pennyworth;" John vi. 7. That is, Roman pennies, each worth about 8d., and the daily wage, at that time, of the poorest labourers.

took care he should be no loser by yielding up his little store.

Depend upon it, we are never losers by giving to God,—if we give with all our heart,—“for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver.” We ought to give, as our Lord says, “hoping for nothing again.” Suppose you were to give a penny or a sixpence out of your own pocket to clothe and feed poor children, or to send the Bible to the heathen, in the hope that God will give you a shilling;—that would not be giving to God at all; it would be giving to your own greedy self. But God often does pay back wonderfully what is given, with no thought of repayment, to His service. A wealthy manufacturer and magistrate in Leeds once said to me:—“Tell your friends, as the testimony of my long experience of business, that *the people who give are the people who prosper.*”

Now comes the most wonderful picture of all. Jesus commanded His disciples to make the people sit down in companies or rows of fifty on the green grass. I imagine them forming a hollow square; Jesus with His Apostles in the midst: a row of fifty men, with a few women and children seated among them, in front; another row on the right



hand, another row on the left hand, and another behind. Other rows sit behind these; twenty-five rows each way; making in all "5,000 men, besides women and children." What eager bustling, what a busy hum and clatter of voices, as they all arrange themselves, like soldiers, at the word of command! Then what a strange solemn hush of wondering expectation, as Jesus, taking the basket in His hand, stands in the midst, looks up to Heaven, and gives thanks to God. Very likely He used the common blessing which the Jews were accustomed to repeat at their meals:—"Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, who hast brought forth this fruit from the earth!" The Jews had a good saying, that a man who takes God's gifts without thanksgiving seems to steal them. God's word says, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."\*

And now, while even the Apostles look on in amazement, marvelling what is to come next, their Master, as if He were doing the most natural thing in the world, takes one of the small loaves and breaks it, and hands the broken pieces first to

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\* 1 Thess. v. 18.

Peter, then to John, and so on to each in turn; and still as He distributes—no one can tell how—the store grows. The Apostles stretch out first their hands, then the skirts of their long robes or mantles, till each is loaded with as much as he can well carry. Then they hasten along the ranks of hungry people, who stretch out eager hands for the miraculous food, hardly believing it real until they taste it. Those in the hinder ranks are ready to cry with disappointment as they see the disciples giving away the last crumb; but they have not long to wait. Jesus stands ready, and as the disciples go back to Him for a fresh supply, the store is undiminished: there is bread enough for all, “and likewise of the fishes, as much as they would.”

“And they did all eat (says St. Mark) and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments and of the fishes.”

It was a very plain meal, only barley-cake and salt fish, with a draught of clear water from some cool mountain brook. Yet I would rather have been there—would not you?—than at Belshazzar’s feast, or Queen Esther’s banquet, or the table of the Rich Man who fared sumptuously every day.

“Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”\* And better,—how incomparably better!—the plainest fare, the homeliest life, the poorest home, with the presence of the Lord, Jesus, the blessing of God, and a thankful, contented heart, than all the luxury and wealth in the world without these. For the poorest and most friendless among the five thousand on the green hill side,—healed by the touch, taught by the lips, fed by the hand, of Jesus, it would have been a poor exchange to have changed places with King Herod in his palace, or with the great Emperor of Rome, Tiberius Cæsar himself. The poorest Christian may sing:—

“As much have I of worldly good  
As e’er my Master had:  
I diet on as dainty food,  
And am as richly clad,  
Though plain my garb, though scant my board,  
As Mary’s Son and Nature’s Lord.”

#### IV.

THIS Marvellous Meal,—more than five thousand people fed and satisfied from one basketful

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\* Prov. xv. 16, 17.

of bread and fish; and twelve times as much left at the end of the meal as there was at the beginning,—is the only one of the miracles of our Lord which is related in all the four Gospels. St. John, in the sixth chapter of his Gospel, not only tells the story of the miracle, but records a discourse of our Lord, when He was teaching, a day or two afterwards, in the Synagogue at Capernaum, in which we see what lessons we are to learn from this glorious miracle.

For you must notice that all our Saviour's miracles contain great and beautiful lessons, for the sake of which they are recorded in the Gospels. Never did He work a miracle merely to show His power. When the unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees asked Him to do so, He refused. Every miracle had its own immediate purpose and use. Nevertheless, their use at the moment,—that is, the benefit enjoyed by those who were healed, or had their sight or speech given them, and so forth, was not their chief purpose. Their noblest use was what St. John speaks of when he tells how Jesus wrought His first miracle, "and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him." The Lord himself speaks of His miracles

as proofs that He had indeed come from the Father, and was speaking the words of God.\* But besides this, they are illustrations—that is, a kind of pictures—of His power, pity, and love. When we see Him cleansing the poor leper, we have an image of the foulness and hideousness of sin, and of His power to cleanse us from all sin. When He opens the eyes of the blind, the mouth of the dumb, the ears of the deaf, and bids the paralytic or the maimed to walk, we are reminded that He only can open our minds and hearts to the truth, and give us strength to do what is right. When we hear Him say, “Believest thou that I can do this?” or, “Thy faith hath made thee whole,” we are taught that if He is to be our Saviour, we must believe in Him,—trust Him wholly, at once and always.

Take your New Testament and read John vi. 25 to 40. This was a sermon which our Lord preached at Capernaum, on the sabbath after He fed the multitude. You see He compares himself to bread. “Jesus said unto them, I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst

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\* See John v. 36; xiv. 10, 11; xv. 24.

(v. 35). And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

How did Jesus give His flesh to be the life of the world? By dying for our sins on the cross. His body was pierced, His blood poured out, and His life sacrificed, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

What does He mean by saying (v. 57), "He that eateth Me shall live by Me?" That as bread nourishes our bodily life, not by looking at it or talking about it, but by receiving it into ourselves, so He gives life to our souls when we receive Him in our hearts by faith as our own Saviour. To '*come*' to Him, and to '*believe*' on Him, is to feed on Him. The body, nourished with perishing bread, must soon die. But Jesus says, "I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." Even the bodies of those who trust to Him He will raise from the grave, clothed in deathless beauty and glory like His own.

On what other great occasion did the Lord Jesus compare Himself to bread? At the Last Supper, when He broke a cake of bread and gave

it to His disciples saying, "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you."

But do not Roman Catholics, and others calling themselves Catholics, say that all these texts mean that the bread in the Lord's Supper is really changed into Christ's body, and the wine into His blood; and that thus we are to feed upon Him, not in our hearts, but with our mouths? Indeed, I am very sorry to say, they do; and they call this "*the literal sense*" of Christ's words. They say this is their plain, natural meaning. And so they worship a crumb of bread, and think they are worshipping the Lord Jesus.

To guard you against this dreadful superstition, I wish you to remember three things.

*First*, we have no right to take the "*literal meaning*" of any words of the Bible (or of anybody) unless there is reason to think it is the *true* meaning. The Bible is full of similitudes or comparisons, which would be nonsense if we took them literally. When Jesus says, "I am the Door of the sheep;" or "I am the Vine; ye are the branches;" no one is so foolish as to suppose He is speaking of a door, or sheep, or a tree and branches, in the common meaning of those words. And when the disciples saw Him stand before them with a broken

cake in His hands, saying, "This is my body broken for you," they could never have imagined—unless they had been out of their minds—that He *was holding His own real living body in His own hands*, and giving it to them to eat! No one in his senses could think so.

*Secondly*, the body of Jesus was broken, and His blood shed, ON THE CROSS; but not at the Last Supper, nor ever since. He rose from the dead. His body in Heaven is not *flesh and blood*, but a glorious body, such as His saints will have at the resurrection.\* So, if the bread and wine could be changed into His body at all, they would not be "flesh and blood," but a "spiritual body."

*Thirdly*, Romanists themselves, and other believers in what is called "Transubstantiation," do *not* really take the *literal*, or plain and natural meaning of our Lord's words. For the plain, natural, literal meaning of "my flesh," "my body," must be that visible body of flesh and blood which Jesus bore about from birth to death; and in which He rose from the tomb. But the body which the Church of Rome declares to be in the bread of the Sacrament, is an *invisible* body, which can be in a hundred thousand places at once, and yet all of it

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\* 1 Cor. xv. 44, 49, 50; Phil. iii. 21. Comp. Heb. ii. 14; v. 7.



in every piece of the bread; a body which no one has ever seen, or ever will see, and which no one can either imagine or understand.

The plain, natural meaning of our Lord's words, therefore, is, that when He spoke of His flesh (or body) and blood, He meant the real living body which was put to death on the Cross. And when He compares himself to bread (just as when He compares the Holy Spirit to living water), the meaning is plain too: what bread is to our body, Jesus is to our soul. He gave His flesh and blood for us, once for all, upon the Cross; but our souls can feed, by faith and love and prayer and thankfulness, on that Sacrifice continually. Do you understand this? Ask Him to explain it to you. Ask Him that He may be the daily food of your thoughts, your affections, your faith. As a Crucified Saviour He has borne your sins. As a Risen, Living Saviour, He is ever ready and able to supply all your need. "My grace," He says, "is sufficient for thee."

"LORD, EVERMORE GIVE US THIS BREAD!"





## LIGHT AND DARKNESS.



WHEN we wish to say that two things are as different as possible, we often say, "*They are as different as light from darkness.*" We cannot fancy any two things more unlike than light and darkness. And yet the Bible says both are alike to God. "THE DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT ARE BOTH ALIKE TO THEE."

They make a wonderful difference to us! During the long days and short nights of summer, when it is never *pitch dark*, we could manage tolerably without lamps or candles; but in the short days and long nights of winter, what should we do if we could not make a sort of artificial day with our candles and lamps? All work would have to cease, indoors and out. There could be no night-trains, nor any kind of night travelling, except on moonlight nights; no evening services,

or lectures, or concerts, or parties; no pleasant reading aloud, or looking at pictures, or amusements of any sort that need light to see what we are doing, after the dark evenings set in. We should be like the Egyptians, when they sat still in the darkness; or should have to grope about like blind people.

But "the darkness hideth not from" GOD; but "the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike" to Him. How can this be? Think, first of all, of what use light is to us: what do we want it for? We want it to see by. But what do we see with? Our eyes. Light would be useless to us without eyes. A blind man can see no better at noon than at midnight. Well; who gave us our eyes? God. Who made the light? God. "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." Then, you see, God has no need of eyes to see with, else He could not have made our eyes, and the eyes of birds, and beasts, and fishes, and insects. "He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" (Ps. xciv. 9.) And God has no need of light to see by, else He could not have made the light. No! God sees all things, not with eyes, but in

His own mind and thought: not by the light of the sun, or moon, or stars, or flames, or lightning, all of which He has created; but by the light of His own eternal wisdom. "GOD IS LIGHT, and in Him is no darkness at all." (1 John i. 5.)

The dark side of our world, where it rolls into its own shadow, which we call "night;" the bottom of the deep ocean, where no light can penetrate; the dark inside of the earth, to its very centre, are all as plain to God's sight as the fields, and hills, and sea, with the sunshine on them. The tiny creatures that you may see through the microscope, but which are quite invisible without a lens, and the very atoms of which they are made—God sees them all. He sees those stars which are so far off that we can only see them as tiny sparks through a powerful telescope, but which are really mighty suns and worlds; for He made them, and He is *there* as much as *here*.

More than all this: God sees our thoughts. If you have a secret that you keep hidden so close in the darkness of your mind that no one guesses it, not even your mother or father, brother or sister; yet God sees it. "Neither is there any

creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. iv. 13.)

What may we learn from this? First, God can always take care of you. Children are often afraid of the dark, even though they know that darkness cannot hurt them. One reason is, that they cannot see anything to make them sure *where they are*, and perhaps feel as if they had forgotten, or as if they might be somewhere else, they know not where. I think even a grown-up person might feel afraid, if he were in pitch darkness, and did not at all know where he was. Another reason is, that in the dark we can *fancy* all sorts of things; and perhaps you are half frightened at your own fancies, though you know they are nothing real. Well, then, remember that God is as much with you and takes as much care of you in the dark as in the light. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him.

When I was a boy, my father used to tell us a story of one of those good men who were called "the ejected ministers," because they were turned out of their homes and churches, and even forbidden by the Government and by Parliament to

preach anywhere. A cruel law was made that they must not come within *five miles* of a town. But those good men knew that "we must obey God rather than men;" so they went on preaching whenever they could, secretly, in out-of-the-way places. Well, one of these good men was coming home late one night after preaching. There was a thick fog, and it was very dark; and he found that he had strayed out of the road. Suddenly he thought he heard a voice behind him. "*Stop!*" He stopped, and listened, but all was still. So he went on a few steps; and then he heard the voice louder and nearer, "*Stop!*" He stopped, and called out, "Who are you? Who is there?" But there was no reply. So at last he was going on again, when the voice came a third time, louder still, as if quite near, "*STOP!*" He shouted again, but no one answered. He took his pocket-knife out of his pocket, opened it, and stuck it into the ground. Then he groped his way to a hedge or bush which he could dimly see through the mist, prayed to God, and lay down and slept. When he woke, the night and the fog were gone, and the sun was shining. He went to look for his knife, and soon found it, sticking where he had

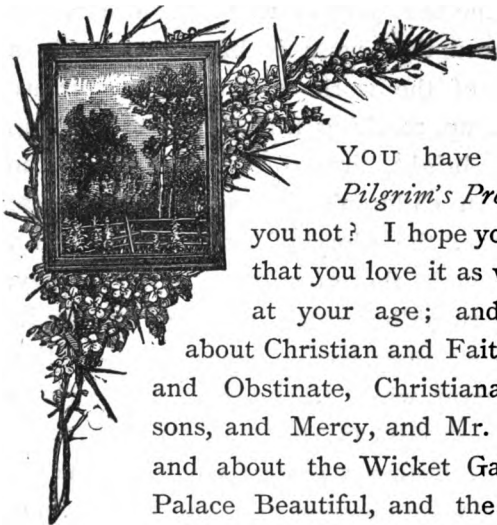
left it. And what else do you think he found? A yard or two further on, a deep pit, or quarry; so that if God had not caused him to hear the voice, and if he had not obeyed it, and stopped just when he did, he would have walked over the edge and been killed. So that was how God took care of His servant in the dark.

The other lesson is this: Remember that God always sees you—in the darkness as much as in the light; sees your secret thoughts as much as your outward actions. Beware of anything, even a thought, that you would *wish* to hide from Him. People often do wicked things which they would not dare to do, or would be ashamed to do, if they did not hope to hide them from everybody. But there is no hiding from God. And remember, no sin, "*nothing that defileth, or maketh a lie,*" can enter into that Beautiful City of which we read that "THERE SHALL BE NO NIGHT THERE." Read Revelation, chapter xxi., verses 23-27.





## COME! FOLLOW!



YOU have read "*The Pilgrim's Progress*," have you not? I hope you have, and that you love it as well as I did at your age; and know all about Christian and Faithful, Pliable and Obstinate, Christiana and her sons, and Mercy, and Mr. Greatheart; and about the Wicket Gate, and the Palace Beautiful, and the Delectable Mountains, and the Celestial City beyond the River. If you do, I should not wonder if some of you have thought as I used to think when I was a boy,—“Oh! I do wish the way of salvation was



a real pilgrimage, with a real gate to enter in at, and giants to fight, and mountains to climb; and a road leading straight on, so that you could always see which was the way, and know that you were in it! Then (thought I) there would be no mistake about it."

Well, let us dream a little, like John Bunyan. Let us imagine that Jacob's wonderful dream has come true, and that news is brought that in a certain part of the world a ladder or staircase has been set up, reaching from Earth to Heaven. Imagine its bright, firm, broad slope, not too steep for even children's feet to climb, straight as a sunbeam; the glory of God shining down upon it through the opening clouds by day, through the twinkling stars at night; and at its foot a golden gateway, having over it an inscription in letters of light, which all can see must be God's own writing:—"THIS IS THE WAY TO HEAVEN."

Now, what further see we in our dream? If such a thing were possible and real, what would happen? Would everybody make haste and climb up to Heaven, and be saved? First of all, there would be such an excitement as the world never witnessed. At first, everybody would laugh at

the story as impossible and absurd. But as fresh accounts came in, and multitudes of travellers with one voice declared they had seen it, everybody would talk of nothing else. The newspapers would give long accounts of the new way to Heaven, and would send special correspondents to visit the place and send home a true report. Steamers and ships of all sorts would sail daily, crowded with pilgrims to that far country, determined at all events to get a sight of the Heavenly Staircase and its golden gateway. People would ask one another—"Are you going to Heaven? When do you set out?"

And what then? Let us join the pilgrims. What do we find when we get there? Thousands, myriads, millions of people, gathered from all lands to behold this wondrous sight; talking eagerly in all languages. "How beautiful!" "How delightful!" "How charmingly safe and easy!" "See," says one, "here is nothing about faith or repentance, or conversion, or anything of that sort; only '*This is the way to Heaven.*' Nothing can be more simple. We can be saved whenever we please." Then, as they watch and see that the staircase does not melt away, and the letters of

light do not fade, people begin to think there is no great hurry. "Any time we like we can begin; but, after all, it must be a hard climb. We will wait till we feel a little stronger and fitter for it."

Some rush singing and shouting through the gate, and climb some distance up the shining road. But when they look down and see the earth so far below, and feel the cool pure air so unlike what they have been accustomed to breathe, and find but few to keep them company, they begin to think going to Heaven is not so easy or pleasant as they expected. Soon we see them coming down faster than they went up, and turning their backs on the golden gate.

Some wait to see what others are doing; whether their friends are going; whether they have plenty of fashionable and educated people, or only poor and plain folk, for company. Others shake their heads and say—"There is some mistake here. This is nothing but a popular delusion. That the staircase goes into the sky is plain, but that does not prove it goes to Heaven. A way ready made and open to everybody without passport or authority of any sort; where the wickedest and most ignorant may climb side by

side with the most learned and righteous, certainly cannot be the proper way to Heaven." So they turn and go away in a rage, and join those who have stayed at home and laughed at the whole thing as impossible, and who would not even take the trouble to go and look at it.

Merchants and traders with an eye to business, bethink them that this great multitude need to be supplied with food and other things, while preparing for the toilsome and perilous ascent. So tents are pitched, houses built, shops and warehouses opened; and a great busy noisy city springs up around the golden gateway; and men walk and drive along the streets, not even troubling themselves to look up at the light, above the brightness of the sun, upon the upward road, or at the letters of light shedding their silver beams through the dark night; but thinking only of their money and their merchandise, their homes or their pleasures.

Do we see no one going up? Yes, a few who are thoroughly in earnest about getting to Heaven, and contented to leave all earthly things behind if only they can get there. Smiling at the doubters, taking sorrowful leave of the lingerers, these press in at the gate, and patiently toil up, and up, and

up, till they pass out of sight, determined never to turn back until they see the face of the Lord Jesus in the far-off Land of Promise.

Straining our eyes, in our dream, to follow them as they climb, we seem to hear soft sweet music gently floating down to earth, and we can catch some fragments of the hymns with which they cheer the way. "But now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city." "This one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Well, it was but a dream, a fancy. But the lesson it teaches is none the less real and true. You see that you and I made a mistake when we thought it would make such a wonderful difference, and make it so easy to be a true Christian, if the way to Heaven were really by going on pilgrimage. You see that the persons who would be saved by going up Jacob's Ladder would be just the very same persons who are saved now; those who believe God's promises; who are in thorough

earnest ; who walk wisely, humbly, stedfastly in the way God has set before them ; and who are willing to deny themselves and give up all things that, as St. Paul says, they may “win Christ and be found in Him.”

Instead of making it easier, it would make it harder. Because then, we should all have to do as so many of the first Christians had—forsake our home and earthly business, and turn our backs on our dearest friends if they would not come on pilgrimage with us. As it is, you need not stir a step from where you are now sitting, in order to enter on the way of salvation, the road that leads to Heaven. It is as real and plain and sure as if you could behold it with your eyes and tread it with your feet. The Lord Jesus himself holds the door open, bidding you to enter ; and shows the way you must take ; in those few short words which He often uttered to His disciples on earth, and which He is saying to each of us now :—  
“COME, FOLLOW ME.”

To come to Christ, and to follow Him :—these two things make up the true way to the Celestial City. They must not be separated. To come to Christ would be useless if we do not mean to

follow Him ; and to follow Him is impossible until we have first come to Him.

## II.

HERE I am reminded of another thought I used to have when I was a child. When our minister finished his sermon by telling us to "come to the Saviour," I remember saying to myself, "He has left off just where I want him to begin. *What is 'coming to Christ'?* How am I to come ; and how am I to tell if I have come?" Have you ever felt puzzled with thoughts of this sort? Well, let me try to make it plain, though it is really so plain that it is hard to make it plainer. Suppose a person is suffering from some painful and dangerous disease, and I say to him, "You have only to go to such a physician, and you will certainly be cured. He has cured hundreds who were worse than you." Next time I meet my poor neighbour, I say "Are you better?" "No ; worse." "Did you go to the physician?" "Yes." "Have you taken his remedy?" "He gave me none." "Why, how was that? What did you tell him?" "Oh ! nothing. I went and sat in his hall, among the other patients, and saw him

talking to them; and when they came away, I came away too." "Why, when I told you to go to him, of course I meant you should tell him all about yourself, and answer all his questions; and then take the remedy he would give you and carefully follow his advice. You will get no good by going and seeing him cure others, if you went to his house every day for twenty years. But if he undertakes your case, and promises to cure you, then you are to trust yourself completely in his hands, and expect to be cured."

Now, just in this same simple way you are to go to the Lord Jesus. Tell Him what you want Him to do for you. Tell Him all that troubles and hinders you. Trust yourself into His hands, to be saved. "Him that cometh to me (He says) I will in no wise cast out."

"Ah! (say you) that would have been very simple and easy when He was here on earth. I should only have had to inquire where He was—at Jerusalem, or Capernaum, or beyond Jordan, or wherever it might happen to be; and then have gone there, seen Him standing before me, and knelt at His feet. THEN, it would have been easy to believe!"

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Not easier than NOW. Perhaps not so easy. For surely, when JESUS was 'a man of sorrows,' walking about and talking, eating and drinking and sleeping, like other people, dressed like them, and only different from them in His face and voice and manner, and wonderful words and mighty works ;—surely, it must have been harder then to believe that He was the Son of God and Saviour of men, than now, when He is reigning as the Lord of glory in Heaven ! But at all events, you know that merely to go to the place where Jesus was, and see and hear Him, was not *coming to Him* as He meant us to come when He said, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." For the unbelieving Pharisees and Scribes came sometimes many miles to see and hear Him ; but yet He said to them, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." They did not believe in Him. That is, they did not believe He was the Son of God ; did not believe He could save them from their sins ; did not believe what He told them ; did not believe they needed the salvation He offered ; and so did not TRUST Him.

So you see, to think it would have been easier

to be a real Christian—a disciple of Christ—if we could have seen and heard Jesus and followed Him about when He was on earth, is just a mistake like that of fancying it would be easier to go on pilgrimage, or to climb to Heaven up Jacob's ladder. To go or come to Christ is just this:—First, believing what the Bible tells us of Him, and what He himself says, and understanding that we are sinners, needing Him as our Saviour, to PRAY to Him; and then to TRUST OURSELVES ENTIRELY to Him. Do you see? '*Coming*' means these two: *praying*, and *trusting*.

### III.

FOR what are we to come? What do we need, which no one else can give us? Suppose the Lord Jesus stood before you, asking you, as He asked blind Bartimæus—"*What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?*"—what would you answer? First of all, we must come to ask for pardon, or forgiveness. His name is called "JESUS" because He saves His people from their sins.\* When the poor paralytic was laid at the feet of Jesus, the first thing Jesus said to him, before He healed him, was, "*Son, be*

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\* Matt. i. 21.

*of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee.*" Dreadful as his disease was, and joyful as his cure would be, the Lord knew there was one thing he needed yet more, one thing that would be still more joyful;—to have his sins forgiven.

You know that if a boy has disobeyed his father, and made him justly angry, he cannot set matters right by diligence in lessons, or by doing some work which his father had previously given him to do. He must confess his fault, and ask forgiveness. Then he will go to his duties with a light heart, and with his father's approving smile to speed him on. Just so, no duties or good conduct can make amends for sin, or set matters right between God and you, unless your sins are forgiven. But what are *my sins*? Sin is failing to obey God's law.\* God's law is, that you love Him perfectly; and love others as yourself—that is, do as you would be done by. All self-will, forgetfulness of God, selfishness, neglect to do and say what you know to be right, and lack of due kindness, justice, courtesy, and generosity, is sin.

Has not every one—have not you—a multitude of sins for God to forgive?

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\* 1 John iii. 5.

Here I fancy some merry but thoughtful boy or girl, who has been patiently reading so far, stopping me with rather a sad look, and saying, "But I have been told that I cannot be forgiven unless I repent, and *feel* my sins, and *hate* them. I don't know how to repent, and I don't think I feel my sins as I ought."

Most likely not, my dear child. I do not know whether any body feels his sins quite as he ought. *If you do not think you have sinned against God at all*, why then you cannot honestly ask forgiveness. "Oh, but I *know* I am a sinner, but I do not *feel* it." Very well; then come to the Lord Jesus, and ask Him both to forgive your sins and to show you what they are, and make you ashamed of them and sorry for them. He can. He is exalted as our Prince and our Saviour "*to give repentance . . . and forgiveness of sins.*"\*

But can repentance make amends for sin? No! A criminal may repent; but a judge, however merciful, cannot say "I freely forgive you": he must condemn and punish him according to law. And is not God, whose law we have broken, our Judge and King, as well as Father? Surely.

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\* Acts v. 31.

How then can God, as the Scripture says, "Justify the ungodly"? Because He has himself paid our ransom. He has given His dear Son to die for us. Jesus has tasted death for every man. "He bare our sins in His own body." Therefore God is not only merciful, but also "faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

#### IV.

NOW let us look at the second of those two words which our Saviour speaks to every one of us. The first was "COME!" What next? The second is "FOLLOW ME!"

Suppose you have started, alone, upon a long journey, on some very important errand. Through carelessness, perhaps thinking you had time enough and to spare, you have strayed from the road—climbing some tempting hill-top to look at the prospect, or chasing a splendid butterfly, or anything which attracted your idle fancy. Presently you perceive that you are lost. With your utmost efforts to regain the road, you do but lose yourself more completely. You know not which way to turn. You are greatly distressed and ashamed of

your folly; but sorrow will not alter what you have done, or bring back your lost time, or show you the path again. What is to be done? You call out as loud as you can—"Lost! lost! lost! Help! help!" That is the most sensible thing you can do. What you want is a Guide, to show you the way. Now, if you have not wandered far, or if the way is easy to find, when some friendly face appears in answer to your doleful cries, it will be enough if he gives you plain directions. "Do you see that footpath, leading to the stepping-stones over the brook; and that clump of trees on the hill-side? Just beyond that lies your road." You have but to follow the direction thus given, and you will soon be in the right way again. But suppose it is a wild mountainous country, where you may be confused among many tracks crossing the moors, or may suddenly plunge into some morass, or slip over some precipice; and the one safe path is hard to find; it will not do for your guide to direct you and then leave you. He will say, "You will never find it for yourself. I will show it to you. Come, follow me."

In those wild dangerous regions where the wayfarer has sometimes to cross roaring torrents

by slender bridges; sometimes to climb steep slopes of rock, coated with ice, or to make his way along narrow dizzy ledges, where to slip would be death, and over glaciers where awful *crevasses*,—huge cracks or fissures in the ice, hundreds of feet deep,—yawn, as if eager to swallow him up; it is often not enough for the guide to lead and show the way. He must tie the traveller to him with a rope, lest he should slip; and sometimes he has to cut steps in the ice with his axe; and the traveller must put his feet, step by step, just where the guide's feet have trod.

So the Lord Jesus is our GUIDE as well as our Teacher. He knows that it would be of little use to say to us, "There! That is your road; walk in it." We are too weak, too ignorant, too sinful, to walk alone along the path of duty. He has given us the example of His own beautiful and perfect life on earth, "*that we should walk in His steps.*"\* But He is not content with that. He goes all the way with us. He says, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you." "The world seeth me not, but ye see me." Faith is the eye with which we see Him; the hand with

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\* 1 Peter ii. 21.

which we lay hold of Him ; the cord, weak perhaps at first, but growing stronger and stronger, the more we pull upon it, by which He binds us to himself that we may not fall.

## V.

WHAT a beautiful thing it would be if a guide could leave behind him footprints of light all along the way, never fading;—glistening like diamonds in the daylight, shining like stars in the darkness, ever brightening as the night grew darker! The life of JESUS, from Bethlehem to Calvary, and from His Cross to His Ascension, seems to have left such shining footprints right through our world, crossing with a track of light even the Valley of Death.

Where do these SHINING FOOTPRINTS lead us? For the last three years of our Lord's sojourn on earth, they lie along rugged steeps and lofty heights of toil and loving self-sacrifice, where but few of His disciples have faith and courage and strength to follow Him. But for thirty years before that, they trace a quiet and lowly path. Tiny child's foot-marks they are to begin with. Then the growing footsteps of the boy, the youth,



the man. And not one of them out of the straight path of duty! The aged Christian has to tread a path along which the Saviour could not travel; the path of lessening activity, lonely bereavement, decaying bodily strength. But the young Christian—the youngest child that reads or hears these words—may say to himself, “There was a time when the Lord Jesus was just as old as I am to-day!” Some day, if you are His true disciple, He may call you to follow Him in His path of public usefulness and self-denying labour. He may even tell you, as He did James and John, that you must drink of His cup, and be baptized with His baptism. But first, you have to learn to follow Him in that quiet path of home duty which He patiently trod for thirty years. Ten times as much of His life as He spent in His public ministry, our Lord and Master spent at home; choosing for that home not a prince’s palace or rich man’s mansion, nor yet a hermit’s cell or cave, but the lowly yet decent dwelling of an artizan in a small country town. Preaching no sermons, working no miracles, except the daily sermon of a blameless life and the constant miracle of Divine humility; patiently earning daily bread

by the toil of His hands ; He silently taught one of the most needful, most beautiful, most heavenly of all lessons : that in such common scenes and earthly duties could be lived a life of perfect holiness, as acceptable to God as it was lovely in the sight of men.

The account of our Saviour's childhood and youth in the second chapter of St. Luke's gospel is marvellously brief. But it tells us of His early piety and wisdom (v. 40) ; His love to His Father's house, and service, and truth (v. 46, 47, 49) ; His filial duty (v. 51) ; and how as He grew 'in wisdom and stature,' so He grew also 'in favour with God and man.' We read, too, that Jesus had many brothers and sisters.\* If (as some believe) these were Joseph's sons by a former marriage, they would be all older than Jesus, and tempted, perhaps, to be jealous of His superior goodness and of His mother's love for Him. If (as others think) they were Mary's own children, then Jesus was their elder brother. In either case, where there are many brothers and sisters in a home, there is sure to be plenty of room for self-denial, generosity, patience, and loving busy helpfulness.

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\* Matt. xiii. 55, 56.

And we may be sure that the lessons which Jesus taught in His ministry and on His cross, He first practised in the quiet home at Nazareth. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in spirit." "The Son of Man came not to be ministered to but to minister." "Even Christ pleased not himself." \*

"We need not bid for cloister'd cell  
Our neighbour and our work farewell ;  
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high  
For sinful man beneath the sky :

The trivial round, the common task,  
Would furnish all we ought to ask ;—  
Room to deny ourselves ; a road  
To bring us daily nearer God."

Along such a quiet every-day path we first trace the Shining Footprints, where even a child's foot may tread in them ; and learn that in looking every one not on our own things but on those of others, we may show 'the mind which was in Christ Jesus.' †

All the footsteps of Jesus upon earth, except during the six weeks after His resurrection, pointed to the cross. Must we follow Him there

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\* Matt. xi. 29 ; xx. 21. Romans xv. 3. † Phil. ii. 5.

too? He says so. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."\* But do not be afraid. The cross—that is, the self-denial, suffering, loss, or reproach—which we may have to bear for Him, is very light compared to what He bore for us. If He calls you to bear trial, He will give you strength for it; and the best way to learn the secret of strength, both for duty and for trial, is to come often in our thoughts to the foot of His cross; think what He suffered there, and why; and say to ourselves—"He loved ME, and gave himself for ME."

The last earthly footprint of Jesus shines the brightest of all. It lies on the top of Mount Olivet, whence He stepped off this earth and ascended to Heaven. I have read of some Hindoo Christians, who thought that "the milky way" among the stars was the path by which the Saviour ascended to Heaven. It was but a fancy; but it was a beautiful fancy, was it not? But we do not need the help of fancy to tell us where He is. He himself has said, "Whither I go ye

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\* Luke ix. 23; Matt. x. 38.

know, and the way ye know." "I AM THE WAY."  
"Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now ;  
but thou shalt follow me afterwards." "I go to  
prepare a place for you, and . . . I will come  
again and receive you to myself ; that where I  
am, there ye may be also."\*

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\* John xiv. 3, 4, 6.





## HYMNS FOR CHILDREN.

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### Creation.

(FOR A LITTLE CHILD.)



GOD makes the flowers and trees to  
spring

Out of the dark brown earth ;

GOD makes the little birds to sing

Their song of love and mirth.

GOD makes the bright and glorious sun

To move and shine on high :

GOD makes the stars, when day is done,

To twinkle in the sky.

The wide deep sea, the winds that blow,

Clouds, rain, and dew-drops small ;

The frost and ice and feathery snow ;—

The great GOD made them all.

HE made the fish to swim and play  
In streams and lakes and seas;  
And butterflies with wings so gay,  
And little busy bees.

The tall giraffe, the tiny mouse,  
The monkey, snake, and frog;  
The frisking lambs, the patient cows,  
Swift horse, and faithful dog.

And many more than I can tell,  
HE made, as He saw good.  
HE loves to see them glad and well,  
And gives them all their food.

HE makes me see, and feel, and move,  
And sends me happy days.  
My GOD, I thank Thee for Thy love:  
Teach me to sing Thy praise!

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### Salvation.

JESUS, God's own Son, has come  
To seek the lost and save them;  
And to win and bring them home,  
All that He had He gave them.  
Who ever loved with love like His? Not one.  
Praise, everlasting praise, to God's dear Son!

Down the smooth and slippery steep  
Of sin, our souls betraying,  
We, like foolish wandering sheep,  
Far from the fold were straying.  
Who ever loved with love like His? Not one.  
Praise, everlasting praise, to God's dear Son!

JESUS, stooping from His throne,  
And laying by His splendour,  
Died, for sinners to atone:  
Strong was His love and tender!  
Who ever loved with love like His? Not one.  
Praise, everlasting praise, to God's dear Son!

See, with those once pierced hands,  
The gate of life unlocking;  
Ready now to save He stands;—  
Now at my heart He's knocking.  
Who ever loved with love like His? Not one.  
Praise, everlasting praise, to God's dear Son!

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### **The Brazen Serpent.**

FIERY fierce the hot sun blazes;  
Fiery fierce the serpents bite;  
Death in this strange form amazes  
Bravest bosoms with affright.  
Hope is lost! ten thousand voices cry.  
All who feel the serpent's sting must die!

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See! within each tent-door lying,  
Anguish-stricken forms are spread.  
Here, the living tend the dying;  
There, the dying watch the dead.  
Hark! glad news! glad news! let hope revive!  
Those who see the Brazen Serpent, live!

Bring your dying child, O mother!  
Children, bear the tidings home!  
Sister, tell it to your brother!  
Let each one that hears say, 'Come!'  
Wide it shines, high-lifted on its pole.  
Look, ye dying! look, and be made whole!

So, our sin's vast burden bearing,  
On the Cross uplifted high,  
Jesus, our own nature wearing,  
Died, that sinners might not die.  
Look to Jesus, conscience-troubled soul!  
Look and live; believe, and be made whole!

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### **The Cry of the Heathen.**

HEAR you o'er the waters  
That despairing cry?—  
'England's sons and daughters,  
Help us, ere we die!  
We are dying.  
Help us, ere we die!

‘Life for us is sorrow;  
Death is endless gloom:  
No eternal morrow  
Shines beyond the tomb.  
We are dying.  
Help us, ere we die!

‘Worshipping in blindness,  
Gods of wood and stone,  
Jesus’ loving-kindness  
We have never known.  
We are dying.  
Help us, ere we die!

‘Nature blooming round us,  
Tells of God in vain;  
Ignorance has bound us  
Fast in Satan’s chain.  
We are dying.  
Help us, ere we die!’

Hear you through the ages  
That redeeming cry?—  
‘Death is sin’s just wages;  
But on Calvary,  
For the dying,  
Jesus came to die.’

God, for man’s transgression,  
Gave His Son to bleed.

Jesus' intercession  
Meets our utmost need.  
For the dying,  
Jesus came to die.

Now the crown He weareth,  
Victor o'er the grave.  
Death's dark keys He beareth.  
Who but He can save?  
Tell the dying,  
Jesus lives to save.

Haste, that Satan may not  
Longer souls enslave!  
Speed the news! Delay not!  
Speed o'er land and wave!  
Tell the dying,  
Jesus reigns to save.

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**Blind Bartimæus.**

(AIR: "*Mothers of Salem.*")

BLIND BARTIMÆUS sits by the wayside begging,  
He hears the multitude draw near, although he  
cannot see;  
"Who's this?" he cries, as they pass by,  
"'Tis JESUS!" Then he lifts his cry,—  
"Jesus! Son of David, have mercy upon me!"

Poor Bartimæus sits by the wayside crying.  
"Now hold thy peace, thou beggar blind, there's  
no one cares for thee!"  
But still he rolls his sightless eyes,  
And louder yet, and louder cries:—  
"Jesus! Son of David, have mercy upon me!"

Rise, Bartimæus! the Saviour stands and calls  
thee!  
"What wilt thou," Jesus asks him then, "that I  
shall do for thee?"  
"Lord, that I may my sight receive."  
"Believest thou?" "I do believe."  
"Receive thy sight," says Jesus, "and follow after  
Me."

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### **The Land of Cloudless Day.**

WHERE is the Land of cloudless day?  
Whose are the feet that mark the way?  
What is the light which through the night  
Shines on the path to guide us right?

Heaven is the Land of cloudless day.  
Saviour! Thy footsteps mark the way.  
Light from Thy perfect word of truth  
Shines to direct our wandering youth.

How may a weak and erring child,  
Ignorant, frail, with sin defiled,  
Tread in the path which Thou hast trod;  
Leading to holiness, peace, and God?

Saviour! on Thee my trust I lay,  
Thou art the truth, the life, the way.  
Wash with Thy blood my soul from sin.  
Dwell by Thy Spirit my heart within.

Bring me to Thee, to know Thy love:—  
Living for Thee, Thy strength to prove;  
Looking to Thee, to run my race;  
Dying to Thee, to see Thy face.

Here we must part: there, friends abide.  
Here we must weep: there, tears are dried.  
Here we must toil: there, grant us rest;—  
Sanctified, glorified, saved, and blest!

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### **Bright Mansions.**

OH! bright are the mansions prepared by the Lord,  
For those who obey Him and trust in His word.  
No longer on earth, He is hid from our sight,  
In the house of His Father, that dwelling of light;  
And there has provided a glorious abode,  
And made it the Home of the children of God.

This Earth, we are sure, cannot long be our rest.  
Our places by others must soon be possest.  
And therefore has Jesus those mansions prepared,  
For all who believe what His word has declared ;  
Who tread the strait path all His people have trod,  
And seek the bright Home of the children of God.

There Christ the Good Shepherd His people will  
feed :

By cool flowing fountains His flock He will lead ;  
No more shall they hunger : the Lord shall provide  
For those whom His love and His mercy shall guide,  
Unharm'd through death's valley, with staff and  
with rod,

To give them a home with the children of God.

No night shall be there, no disease nor decay.  
All tears from their faces will God wipe away.  
No friend shall depart, and no enemy come  
To trouble the peaceful enjoyment of home.  
On Earth, for a season, our path must be trod ;  
But Heaven is the Home of the children of God.

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### **Light and Strength.**

LORD ! on our blindness  
Shed forth Thy light.  
Thy loving-kindness  
Scatter our night.

Let us in meekness  
Hold on our race;  
And in our weakness  
Perfect Thy grace.

Pilgrims and strangers,  
Rescued from sin,  
Round us are dangers,  
Fears lurk within.  
Trusting to Jesus,  
Firm may we be,  
Nor let aught please us  
Hateful to Thee.

Faithful and fearless,  
Arm'd with Thy might,—  
Be our path cheerless,  
Or fill'd with light,—  
By love held fast, Lord!  
By truth set free,  
Make us at last, Lord!  
Victors through Thee!











